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RAMA

RALPH STOCK

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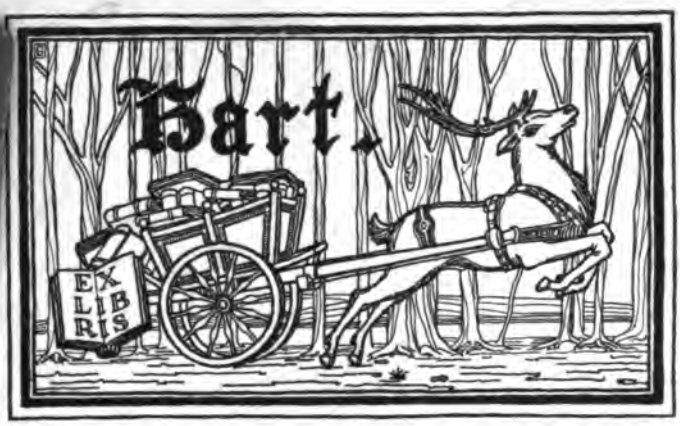

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MARAMA

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A round, white figure reeled into the open. FRONTISPIECE.
See Page 185.

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MARAMA

A TALE OF
THE SOUTH PACIFIC

BY

RALPH [illegible]

AUTHOR OF "[illegible]"

[illegible]

[illegible]

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1918

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MARAMA

A TALE OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC

BY

RALPH STOCK

AUTHOR OF "THE CONFESSIONS OF A TENDERFOOT," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

HENRY ROTH

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1913

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MARAMA

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH MARAMA CONQUERS A SMALL KINGDOM AND DISCOVERS HERSELF

"RIGHT O."

Marama Thurston's usually melodious voice travelled the length of the passage in a raucous whisper, then she withdrew her head and shoulders into room fifteen, and awaited developments, in a particularly pretty nightdress and a state of pleasurable excitement.

A moment before her plebeian assurance, the long corridor of Miss Standfast's "finishing" school for young ladies, St. Leonards-on-Sea, had been as silent as such decorous places should be at eleven o'clock at night. But now, as though by magic, doors were softly opened and white-robed figures flitted one by one into the dimly-lit passage, to disappear with a faint patter of naked

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feet, a suppressed giggle or warning "ssh" into room fifteen.

For upwards of three minutes this continued, until the tiny apartment was crowded with girls of all ages and in every stage of excitement and déshabille, talking in ear-splitting whispers, and clustering round a medley of indigestible comestibles laid out with an eye to artistic effect on a couple of towels in the middle of the room.

By the light of a spluttering candle, stuck jauntily in the neck of a lemonade bottle, the bidden guests of the evening reviewed their repast with critical eye, for each had contributed her quota towards its purchase out of all too scanty pocket money, and took a personal interest in the ingredients.

Cream buns predominated, and cherry tarts ran them a close second; then there were méringues, chocolate biscuits, and a bottle of stuffed olives.

Everybody declared that Marama was to be highly commended, for it was she, who else, who had smuggled the dainties into that queer, tin-lined trunk of hers, and lent her room for the occasion.

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It was always Marama, Marama with her tranquil, brown eyes and soft, persuasive voice, who did everything — why, nobody exactly knew, except that her power over "Fuzzy"— *vide* Miss Standfast — and indeed everyone with whom she came into contact, was little short of hypnotic. The French master favoured her with unblushing transparency, and "Fuzzy"— it was an historic fact that this seemingly stony-hearted spinster had, on one occasion, imposed a loss of five marks on the erring Marama, and had, a few hours later, forgiven her in a flood of tears.

Still more miraculous, however, was the fact that no one begrudged her these leniencies; they seemed but the natural order of things, and no one was less surprised at them than Marama herself. She had come to accept most things as her right, including the responsibility of every hair-brained prank a girls' school — even a "finishing" school — can evolve, which, one is given to understand, is not such a limited process as mere man might suppose.

"Personally," observed a large-boned girl with an outdoor complexion and a wrist-strap, leaning over the "table" with the same earnest

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expression she wore on the hockey field, "personally, I think it looks simply juicy, and I vote we drink Marama's health in lemonade."

"Hadn't we better sit down first?" suggested Marama, in her soft, self-possessed drawl. "Besides," she added, when all were seated tailor-fashion, "there's only half a bottle each, and we ought to save that for the girls who are leaving, you, Jesse, Vera, and May — lucky beggars! Who's for a stuffed olive?"

Something uncommonly like a mêlée ensued, in the midst of which a board creaked ominously in the passage, and twelve white-clad figures clutched each other's arms convulsively.

"It's only Trix," came a whispered assurance; "it's her feet; she can't help it, poor dear —"

"What's that about my feet?" demanded the newcomer, a fat, ungainly girl in a pink flannel nightdress. "I should like to know —"

"Sit down," said Marama. "You've nearly missed a round of olives; where are those chocolate biscuits?"

"I'm not so sure about the luck," resumed May Standish, a thin, pale girl with thin, pale

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feet. "What is there for a girl when she leaves school — I mean if she hasn't actually got to work? Nothing but all the silly things she does in the holidays; I'm sick of them already."

"But there is work, whether we have to or not," protested the girl of the wrist-strap, with an earnestness slightly marred by a mouthful of cream bun. "I'm going to be a sports-mistress or die in the attempt."

"Then I should die in the attempt," responded the thin, pale girl listlessly; "besides, how about one's people?"

"There's marriage," suggested Marama.

"Marriage — ugh!" The expression of the girl with the wrist-strap signified whole-souled disgust. "Ugh!" she repeated with emphasis.

"I think I should rather like to be married," continued Marama, nibbling thoughtfully at a chocolate biscuit. "I've thought about it all — you know — looked right away into the future to when we're old, and it seems to me that's what we were made for."

"The old idea!" sniffed the other contemptuously.

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"And perhaps the right one," conceded the thin, pale girl, "but fancy admitting it."

"I've got a cramp in my left leg," announced a tousled little witch whose mouth showed signs of conflict with a cherry tart. "If I move, I scream; what's to happen?"

"Sit still while we think it out," said Marama severely.

"There are two courses open," observed the girl with the wrist-strap judiciously; "either we can gag her and straighten out the — ah — member, or carry her to her room, where she can scream as much as she likes. Which is it to be?"

"I haven't had a méringue yet, and you've had two," wailed the witch.

"Then gag it is."

The operation was soon carried out on Marama's bed, and the banquet was nearing its end, when the girl with the wrist-strap scrambled to her feet.

"Ladies," she said, with all the impressiveness of a master of ceremonies, "it is my pleasant duty to propose the health of our friend and — ah — schoolfellow, Marama Thurston.

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What I should have done, what Standfast's in general would have done, without her, during these years of — ah — incarceration, I tremble to think. (Murmurs of applause.) We all know that she has led and we have followed in anything that has been worth the doing. (Pause.) We all know that without her Standfast's would have been an egg without salt, roast beef without mustard — ah — I'm afraid that's all, girls," she ended abruptly; my night-dress cuff wouldn't hold any more. "Ladies, I give you Marama Thurston!"

The applause took the form of vigorously tapped thumb nails, and the toast was sipped from a glass passed silently round the charmed circle.

"Speech! Speech!" hissed some one, and the demand was taken up in whispered chorus.

For a moment Marama sat with bowed head and flushed face; then, in response to a vigorous pinch from the witch, rose leisurely to her feet.

"I'm sorry," she said. "It's no go; I couldn't make a speech if a box of Fuller's depended on it; besides"— she glanced at the cuff of her

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nightdress —"Fuzzy makes me wear flannel. I can only thank you —"

"The dance, then!" hissed the same mysterious some one, and again the subdued but insistent echo came —"The dance! The dance! The dance!"

Everyone knew and loved the weird antics Marama called her dance, though its fascination was hard to define. Perhaps it was the knowledge that it emanated from her far-off native land, the islands of romance and supposed barbarism, for even "finishing" schools cannot entirely eradicate primitive instinct. Certainly it was part of her, transforming their usually mild-eyed, languorous schoolfellow into a very imp of devilment.

There were few at Standfast's who could not recall its inception in the gymnasium, one wet half-holiday when tennis and cricket were a forlorn hope.

"We've all got to do something," Marama had announced with characteristic unexpectedness, "everybody — even Trix."

And one by one, either by force or persuasion, every one had done something — on the dais

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used for theatricals on speech days. A more extraordinary vaudeville performance was probably never performed. The thin, pale girl obliged with a life-like representation of a well-known actress in a yearning moment. The girl with the wrist-strap accomplished some prodigious feats with the witch as an animated dumb-bell, and Trix was chivied into reciting "The Recessional."

"I want you all to help me," Marama had announced in her imperious fashion, when her turn arrived. "You'll probably think it rot, but I'm going to do something I've been wanting to for some time. Listen —" She seated herself on the edge of the dais, and spoke with unaccustomed and contagious eagerness. "Listen — you're not 'finishing' at Fuzzy's at all; you're in the Islands — on Taviuni. There's a sun you've never seen in England streaming down on you, and there" — she indicated the cocoa-nut matting under the horizontal bar with a sweeping gesture of the hand — "over there is a white, sandy beach with a blue, blue sea beyond. You're not in gym things, but long, loose sort of nightdresses with nothing underneath, and

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you're going to be chorus while I dance a meke.[1] You squat in a semicircle so"— she dragged her schoolfellows into position —"and you clap your hands and hum, so —" she illustrated her meaning in a growing fever of excitement until the now enthusiastic semicircle was swaying, clapping and humming with a will.

"Splendid!" cried Marama, leaping on to the dais, and waving her arms in frantic endeavour to order the rhythm. "Ripping! There — now — so —"

What followed was now being reënacted in room fifteen on the last night of the Easter term, but with a difference. "Standfast's" had had practice. Every one knew the chant; and now twelve "finishing," English young ladies squatted in a semicircle before their presiding genius, swaying in perfect unison, gently clapping, softly chanting a measure that a hundred years ago and seventeen thousand miles distant, had equally well pleased a horde of South Sea cannibals.

"Oo-ah, oo-ah," droned the subdued chorus, and Marama flickered to her feet. She actually

[1] Native dance.

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flickered, like a long white tongue of flame. She was dancing the candle-nut dance, though she had no notion of it. She only knew that something within impelled her to do what a candle-nut did — light, flicker upward, drift this way and that, fanned by a breath, flicker again and die. Other movements crowded her brain, movements of the arms, the hips, the hands, the body, and she followed blindly as they led. Her mind was dead to all about her. How she loved it! It was like a delicious dream, a vision — shattered in an instant by a penetrating "ssh" from the doorway where Trix kept vigilant watch.

The candle-nut flame was dead, and Marama Thurston stood in its stead, her face set in strained attention, her hand upheld for silence.

Down-stairs a light footfall sounded upon the tiles of the hall, growing fainter as it ascended the carpeted stairs.

"Now don't be idiots!" she hissed, as the company started to its feet in a panic. "One by one — no crowding — Trix first." The voluminous pink nightdress vanished into the gloom of the corridor, a board groaned, and

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there was silence. "Now, as I call the names and not before, mind — May, Jessie, Vera . . . "

The orders were given and obeyed with the precision of a regiment of soldiers, and several seconds before the footfalls had reached the head of the stairs the corridor was deserted, the candle extinguished, and Marama feverishly occupied in stowing a towel full of battered pastry under the bed.

Outside room fifteen Miss Standfast paused and gently knocked, then, receiving no answer, opened the door. By the dim, reflected light of a turned-down gas jet at the end of the corridor, she could just discern Marama's slender body outlined beneath the white counterpane, the dark mass of her hair against the pillow, and a small, well-shaped hand flung wide, as though in her sleep she had felt the heat of the night. Her breathing was even and just audible.

Miss Standfast stood looking down on her for some moments and sighed; then she gently touched the outstretched hand.

"Don't be frightened, dear," she said, "it's I, Miss Standfast."

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"What do you want?" gasped Marama, starting into a sitting position and blinking realistically. "Oh, it's you, Miss Standfast." She subsided on to the pillows with a well-delivered sigh of relief.

"Yes, don't be frightened," repeated Miss Standfast, sitting on the edge of the bed, "I'm afraid I startled you, but I wanted to have a little chat with you, Marama. Not in the study as teacher and pupil, but here, in your bedroom — as woman to woman. You don't mind?"

Marama conscientiously rubbed her eyes.

"Not a bit," she said, sitting up languidly.

"You see," continued Miss Standfast, "our relations in the first respect cease to-night; I have had a letter from your father."

This piece of news had an extraordinary effect on Marama. Her well-assumed lethargy vanished on the instant, and her soft eyes shone in the semi-darkness. Her hands went about her knees with fingers tightly interlocked.

"Have you?" she said eagerly. "What did he say?"

"He says he wants you back — back in Fiji, at once."

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For a moment there was silence, broken at last by Marama's breathless little laugh.

"Oh, I'm glad," she said, "so glad — no, I don't mean that; you've been good, and I've been happy here, but — but you know what I mean; I've always wanted to go back. I was born there; I belong there."

"Yes, I know what you mean," said Miss Standfast.

"Of course, I don't remember anything about it; just palms and blue sea and a sandy beach, and dad. I can just remember dad, a big man with a grey beard that I used to pull when he took me into the sea; and a turtle — yes, I can remember him giving me a ride on a turtle; that's all —"

"Are you sure that's all?"

"Yes — I think so," Marama stared thoughtfully over her knees at the blank wall. "No," she said suddenly, "that's not all —"

Miss Standfast drew a quick breath, and fastened her penetrating eyes on the girl's face.

"Well," she prompted.

"The other day," said Marama slowly, "I remembered quite suddenly another grey-bearded

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man; he was talking to dad somewhere in a big, airy place —"

"A verandah."

"Yes, it might have been a verandah. I was sitting on dad's knee, and he leant forward and said: 'It's the best we can hope for her, Mr. — Mr.—' I forget the name. Isn't it funny my remembering that out of all the other things that must have happened? And I've been wondering since what he meant. I sort of feel they were talking about me. What do you think they meant, Miss Standfast?"

The schoolmistress laughed nervously.

"My dear child, how should I know? They might have meant anything."

"I suppose they might," sighed Marama. "Did he say why he hadn't written lately?"

"No," lied Miss Standfast.

"And why he wants me all of a sudden like this?"

"No."

"Oh, well, I shall soon know. Won't it be funny going home after twelve years? Perhaps a lot more things will come back — perhaps they won't. I can hardly realise it — I —"

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Suddenly Marama caught herself looking into Miss Standfast's face. Its expression startled her.

"Why do you look at me like that?" she demanded.

The other moved uneasily on the edge of the bed, and her usually steady grey eyes fell to the two white hands folded in her lap.

"I shall miss you very much, Marama," she said a trifle hurriedly. "I had hoped that you looked upon this, my house, as your home," she looked up quickly; "and I want you to remember always that it is your home, whatever you may think of it — a second home that you can come to when — if — you ever want to."

Miss Standfast had seldom been guilty of such a disjointed, undiplomatic utterance.

Marama said nothing. She only felt that she knew this intensely respectable, rather plain-looking woman, with the grey, fuzzy hair and gold-rimmed glasses, for the first time in her life, and rather liked her.

"And this too, Marama," Miss Standfast continued more fluently, "that you are practically alone in the world because, as you know, your

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mother died at your birth, and although only seventeen, you are a woman. I know what it is to be alone, but my experience would not help you because we are different in so many ways. You will have far more temptation than I ever had, because you are beautiful, and beautiful women have the power of making great friends and great enemies." Her rather thin voice took on an added intensity. "Use all the insight, all the instinct that God gives us to distinguish one from the other, Marama, for on the surface they are very much alike. All women have that instinct, but few allow themselves to be guided by it. If you allow yourself to be guided by it, you will not go very far wrong. There, I think that ends the lecture. Your father has sent you a hundred pounds, and I think you had better go P. and O. It takes seven weeks. We will make all arrangements to-morrow, and — good night."

Miss Standfast leant over the bed and kissed the troubled face on the pillow.

"I'm a beast!" said Marama suddenly and with extraordinary vigour, "a deceitful little beast!"

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"Good gracious!" murmured Miss Standfast; "what has made you suddenly come to that conclusion?"

"It isn't sudden," snapped Marama. "I've known it for years and years and years; I pretend; I act. You know what a nuisance I've been sometimes; those were the times when you found me out, but they're nothing, just nothing at all, to the times when you didn't. I've been the ringleader in every mortal thing that's been done to annoy you. I was made ringleader because everybody knew that if we were found out you would say less to me than to anybody else. I've been trading on your kindness, and I hate myself!"

"Hush, hush," protested Miss Standfast.

"But I won't hush. This very night I pretended — I made you think I was asleep when I wasn't. Just before you came in, I was sitting in the middle of the floor, gorging cream buns and things that I snuggled in yesterday. They're under the bed now — or what's left of them — there!"

Miss Standfast knelt down and gravely drew forth the battered remains of the banquet.

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"I saw you standing by the bed," continued the inexorable Marama, "and I heard you sigh — why did you sigh?"

And Miss Standfast, standing by the door, grasping a soggy, bulgy towel, found it impossible to answer her.

Out in the passage she hesitated with her hand on the door-knob, then turned and walked quickly towards the stairs.

"Poor child," she murmured, "she will have to find it out for herself; we all have to find things out; I can't tell her, I simply can't."

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CHAPTER II

MARAMA MAKES A FRIEND, AND ANOTHER DISCOVERY

IT is a far cry from the Marine Parade, St. Leonards-on-sea, to Taviuni, Fiji, but Marama enjoyed every mile and moment of it.

As day after day sped by, the great ship forged through seas of inconceivable colours, peopled with the strangest denizens, from ungainly hammer-head sharks and playful porpoises, to delicately-beautiful flying fish that skimmed the water with flashes of emerald green body and silver wing. It was slowly borne in on her that she was approaching another world, a world as different from that left behind as it was possible to conceive, yet at times strangely familiar.

The passengers were kind — especially the men. Marama had already decided that she preferred them to women, and she had experienced none of that lost sensation she had ex-

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pected in this world, beyond the shelter of Miss Standfast's wing. In point of fact, she had never felt more at home. So far, life had consisted of cricket, deck billiards, fancy-dress balls, and innoxious conversations by moonlight at the ship's rail, and Marama found it good and sufficient.

Three days out a florescent gentleman, frankly owning to the name of Goldsmid, lent her "*Cynthia in the Wilderness.*"

"It may help," he said paternally, "but don't leave it about and — er, you know what I mean."

Marama did know, thanked him, and read it seated in a wicker chair on the promenade deck, to the horror of the other ladies who had been less honest but more circumspect.

"Thank you so much," she said, on returning it a few days later, "but how did you mean it would help?"

Her tranquil, brown eyes conveyed nothing but interested inquiry, and Mr. Goldsmid's beringed hand fluttered to his tie.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, "seemed to me a young girl — alone — all that sort of thing —

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ought to know something of life; it's a great mistake —"

"But there's nothing in it that I didn't know before," said Marama, and Mr. Goldsmid muttered something that sounded very like "Good Lord," and suggested a game of quoits.

Two days from Colombo she received her first offer of marriage. It was like nothing she had expected — for she had expected it — and she felt vaguely disappointed. In the first place the setting was so romantic, and the actual experience so very much the reverse, and in the second, she had thought that she would like to marry, and now found that she didn't want to in the least. The suitor was a wealthy, middle-aged tea planter, returning to his estate in Assam. A "nice old man," Marama thought him, and studied his advances with much the same interest that she had brought to bear on the antics of a blue monkey at the Zoo.

"I can't," she said, looking him straight in the face and noting with a shudder that hairs sprouted from his nostrils. "Oh, I don't exactly know why," she added, in answer to the inevitable query, "except that I don't want to."

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Afterwards she wondered if she ought to have said "thank you." The affair would have been amusing if it had not been rather puzzling. Now if the nice boy in the white flannel suit who partnered her at deck billiards had — But the nice boy in the white flanel suit "hadn't," and didn't, for exactly half a dozen excellent reasons of his own.

The first woman to overlook the facts that Marama was pretty, alone, and noticeably popular with the male element on board, was Miss Beatrice Halliday. A weird little lady with hair scratched back from a shiny, intelligent forehead, bright pinpricks of eyes, and unnecessarily short skirts.

"I hope you'll pardon me," she said, with a quick smile, deliberately taking some one else's chair next to Marama, "but you've interested me so much that I propose to use you."

Marama had no idea what to say, so she lowered the novel she had been reading and said nothing, which, in itself, is something of an accomplishment.

"I know you won't mind," continued the other hurriedly. "My name is Halliday —

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Beatrice Halliday. You may have heard of it." She paused. "I have my public, a small but loyal one, and I always warn people, you know. Then, if they recognise themselves afterwards — which in nine cases out of ten they don't — they can't blame me, can they?"

The sentence was completed with an hysterical catch in the rather high-pitched voice.

"I suppose not," Marama admitted, with a slow smile that cloaked her mental struggle to grasp the situation.

"One can but draw one's characters from life," resumed Miss Halliday, with a sigh of resignation. "It's a terrible affliction, Miss Thurston — there, you see I know your name — sometimes I almost wish I could give it up, but ideas, like murder, will out. I must remember that," she added thoughtfully. "They are ulcers — no, ulcers would hardly do, a rash perhaps,— that *must* come to the surface." The thought seemed to please her, for she smiled and blinked at the Indian Ocean.

"I suppose they are," said Marama, who for the life of her could think of nothing else to say.

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"I have been trying to place you for days," pursued the little lady, as though referring to a new species of insect, "but I can't; I've seldom been so baffled. You're not a Latin, and yet — your manner is so — so otiose — that's the word; your carriage so graceful and unaffected. Of course your speech assured me that you were not American —"

"I'm glad you find me interesting," said Marama, "I can give you heaps more guesses."

"Irish!" bleated Miss Halliday.

Marama laughed and shook her head.

"Perhaps my other name will help. Marama — M-a-r-a-m-a."

Miss Halliday subsided.

"I give it up," she said.

"I'm a Fijian."

"Really? How very, very interesting."

"Not a Kanaka, you know. My parents were English, but I was born in Fiji."

"And you are going home?"

"Yes, after twelve years."

"How very, very interesting," repeated Miss Halliday, blinking assiduously. "Do you know, I'm dying to ask you all manner of questions

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about the islands, but don't tell me — not a word, mind. First impressions are invaluable, and it might spoil them. I'm making the round trip and I like things to burst on me, Miss Thurston; there's nothing like it. After all, the eyes are a lens and the mind a photographic plate. To obtain a clear impression, we must keep it unfogged before and after exposure, until development in fact. Then we have a lasting — I was going to say negative, but there the simile ends, for our mental pictures are positive, unless our views are jaundiced — no, I'm afraid that won't do." Her voice trailed away into meditative silence.

"I don't think you need have any fear on that score," said Marama, "because I left Fiji when I was four: I couldn't throw any light on your 'photographic plate' if I tried."

But Miss Halliday's energetic brain had already tacked.

"That makes you sixteen," she announced, with startling abruptness. "Really, now, I should have taken you for at least four years older."

"Thanks," said Marama.

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"I'm making the round trip and I like things to burst upon me, Miss Thurston." *Page* 26.

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"And don't be annoyed — it's a compliment if you only knew it; you seem to have skipped the unpleasant age of gawkiness and giggles; you neither gush nor assume dignity. Naturalness at sixteen and with an English school training — it's extraordinary!"

Miss Halliday showed her approval by blinking with unprecedented rapidity.

"Please!" laughed Marama, "I expected to be interested when I left school, not to interest."

Miss Halliday leant forward and rested a kindly hand on the girl's knee.

"Unless I am very much mistaken, you'll accomplish both," she said, with quiet conviction. "Shall we walk?"

And it was not until the evening that Marama learnt she had been talking with a well-known novelist. She certainly liked her, and what was perhaps more important, Miss Halliday liked Marama, so that the two spent a very pleasant three days in Sydney before taking boat for Fiji.

At Suva Marama received something of a shock. There was no one to meet her. The stewards said she had not been asked for. It

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was a keen disappointment, and also a little curious. She had often pictured this home-coming — a grey-haired man, looking little older than when she had seen him last, standing on the crowded wharf, eagerly scanning the passengers along the ship's rail, a look of anxiety crossing his face as he failed to recognise her. Of course, it would be impossible for him to recognise her — she had often laughed at this thought; then the dawn of wondering comprehension as she ran down the companion and laughingly kissed him.

Instead, she sat in a deck chair, absently watching the teeming life below her. There was a vague familiarity in the scene that strangely stirred her blood. She remembered how the Fijian, with his white sulu, fine calves, and shock of six-inch-long hair, sometimes black and ornamented with red hibiscus blossoms, sometimes plastered dead white with lime, and sometimes bleached to a hideous red — again with lime. She remembered those fantastic, wooded peaks across the harbour, the thin-shanked Indian coolies, the slow-moving, clumber-built Fijian women in their "town" wrappers of gorgeously

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patterned chintz; the Samoan coral sellers, the half-naked wharf labourers, laughing and chatting like overgrown schoolboys as they raced behind their trucks along the narrow railway line — or she thought she did, which for most of us amounts to much the same thing. But back of all this, there was an indefinable something that touched a responsive chord of memory with peculiar insistence. It was all-pervading yet illusive, and Marama temporarily forgot her troubles in the quest of it. Until, it came to her in a flash — copra, that was it, the pungent, unmistakable smell of dried cocoanut. She was home; claimed or unclaimed, she knew now that she was home!

Miss Halliday was leaning over the ship's rail, her bright, restless eyes blinking through the direct view-finder of a camera.

"First impressions!" she laughed over her shoulder, as Marama came to her side.

They took rooms at McDonald's Hotel, and Marama, alone and a prey to doubt and disappointment, spent a dreary afternoon of fruitless inquiry.

In the evening she went into Miss Halliday's room, hot and tired, to disturb her in the process

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of conveying "first impressions" to paper — "before they melt"— as the little lady explained.

"I'm sorry to interrupt," said Marama, taking off her hat and flinging it with a gesture of weariness on the bed, "but what do you think I ought to do?"

"Do?" repeated Miss Halliday, whose mind had not quite disentangled itself from a sunset across Suva harbour.

"Yes, there's nobody here for me, though dad said there would be in his letter, and no one seems to have heard of the name Thurston,— even in a tiny place like this. I can't make it out."

"You poor child," said Miss Halliday, shutting her note-book with precision. "You surely know where your home is?"

Marama laughed, but there was no mirth in it.

"Oh, yes," she said listlessly. "On Taviuni, a day by steamer from here, but —"

"Then why not go straight on there?"

The unusual position of this lonely girl seemed to come home to Miss Halliday with sudden force. She leant forward with a kindly abruptness that was one of her many mannerisms.

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"You are really a wonderful child, Marama," she said admiringly. "Most girls would be in semi-hysterics by this time."

"I think I am," Marama answered. "I hoped I wasn't showing them."

She paused at the door.

"I was wondering," she said at last, "whether you'd care to come and stay with us. Father has a plantation somewhere on Taviuni. I know that much, and I know he would be pleased to see you. It might help the 'first impressions.'

"Thank you, dear," beamed Miss Halliday, "I should love to."

But when the door had closed, her small, mobile features relapsed into grave thoughtfulness. Presently she wandered out on to the balcony overlooking Victoria Parade.

"I'm not often mistaken," she murmured into the warm darkness, "but — I wonder . . ."

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CHAPTER III

IN PARADISE — AND PERPLEXITY

TAVIUNI, with its iron-bound coast of jagged rocks hurled from the sea by some mighty convulsion of the earth's past to guard the gentle green terraces of meadow and cocoanut grove that lay behind, drifted up from the horizon like some enchanted isle of a fairy tale, and Marama's heart leapt at the beauty of it.

Here, at least, was something to be proud of. She could read the enthusiasm in her companion's face, and it was all for this, her home. A lump seemed to rise in her throat, and an unaccountable moisture dimmed her eyes.

She wondered that such a paradise had not made a greater impression on her childish mind, had not called her with a louder and more insistent voice, during those twelve colourless years at St. Leonards; for she realised now, as never before, how colourless they had been. Heavens!

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The Marine Parade on a dull December day and — this!

The *Amra* anchored off Vuna Point, a vivid green headland jutting into a sea of inconceivable blue, and a whale-boat put out from shore, manned by half a dozen exuberant Fijians and a sedate overseer in white ducks.

"Anything for Vuna?" he shouted, as they came alongside, and as an answer to his question came the clank and gasp of the winches, as a varied assortment of cargo, from cases of tinned meat to bales of barbed wire, were lowered into the whale-boat and wrestled into compact position by the sweating Fijians.

"Munia?" yelled the overseer above the din, in answer to Marama's query, "Thurston's place? Yes, I know it; right up at the north end; are you for there?"

"I'm Miss Thurston," shouted Marama.

The overseer looked up at her with frank wonderment written on his boyish, mahogany-coloured face

"Oh, ah, yes," he said, "Maddon is over from there; you'd better come ashore and see Mrs. Harte."

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Miss Halliday was carrying on an earnest conversation with the second officer—"Bullamacow?" the latter was saying; "oh, that's tinned beef. When the first cattle came here from Australia the niggers didn't know what they were until some one pointed to an animal and told them it was a bull and another a cow; ever since then everything, mutton and pork included, is called bullamacow—saves trouble, you know—"

"I seem to be always interrupting," said Marama, "but we must go, Miss Halliday; they've nearly finished loading."

They were rowed ashore seated on a pyramid of flour sacks and their own luggage, and were met on the jetty by a kindly looking, grey-haired lady and a fussy old gentleman in a dirty solar topee.

"The mail, Warden," he exploded, before the boat was made fast. "Never mind all that other trash," the trash apparently including the two passengers, "send the mail up to the house at once—at once, mind. And get a move on these beggars, or we shan't get through to-night." He indicated a gang of perspiring, thin-

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shanked coolies standing with an air of meek apprehension at the side of a line of copra trucks.

The overseer strode amongst them, shouting bad Hindustani with well-simulated ferocity, and they scattered to their task of loading the whale-boat like a swarm of scurrying black beetles.

"— and this is a friend of mine, Miss Halliday," concluded Marama, who had struggled through the process of introduction in spite of the turmoil about them.

Mrs. Harte led the way up a winding shell pathway to the house.

"I can hardly believe my eyes," she said for the third time, when they were seated on a wide verandah overlooking the sea, "Jim Thurston's daughter!"

"Why, what is there so extraordinary in that?" laughed Marama.

Mrs. Harte's kindly face was vaguely troubled.

"You don't seem to realise," she said, leaning forward in her chair, "that I only knew you as a toddling little ragamuffin bare-footed, bare-

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headed, and brown as a berry, playing on the sandy beach up at Munia."

"Ah! Then there is a sandy beach there," said Marama; "I thought I remembered it."

"Is that all you remember?"

"Pretty nearly, but please tell me more. How's dad, and why didn't somebody come to meet me? How far is it, and how do we get there?"

"I think that demands a cup of tea," said Mrs. Harte, smiling; "don't you, Miss Halliday?"

The two elder women exchanged a quick glance that might or might not have conveyed a meaning — neither was sure.

"Nothing sounds quite so nice at the present moment," said Miss Halliday, "but what a heavenly spot this is. I'm feasting on it, Mrs. Harte."

With the advent of tea, Marama resumed her fusillade of questions, and Mrs. Harte busied herself with the sugar and milk while she answered them.

"Your father is well, dear, that is as well as

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can be expected. You know, I suppose, that he isn't very strong."

"I didn't," said Marama brusquely. "It seems to me I don't know anything. I hadn't heard from him for six months before he wrote for me to come home, and I didn't think much about it. It's queer what one can get used to in time. What a self-centered little beast I've been!" she added with sudden vehemence. "He might have been ill — dying. He may have wanted me for years — but what could I possibly do?"

"You could do nothing," said Mrs. Harte gently. "You have done all that he wished you to do. He will tell you so when he sees you."

But Marama stared down at her spotless white shoes and frowned.

"As to the meeting at Suva," Mrs. Harte went on a trifle hurriedly, "there was an accident about that. Your brother-in-law, Mr. Maddon —"

"My brother-in-law?" exclaimed Marama. Suddenly she seemed to remember herself and laughed whimsically. "You must think me an extraordinary person, Mrs. Harte, but I didn't

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know I had a brother-in-law. I knew I had a sister, and wondered why dad didn't send her home, too, but — when did she marry?"

Mrs. Harte's pale face was suffused with delicate colour.

"About a year ago," she said. "Mr. Maddon was to have gone to Suva by the last *Amra*, but — he — he missed it. It was most unfortunate, as there is only a fortnightly service at present."

"And where is he now?"

"He is still here," said Mrs. Harte, "I — I think you'll find him on the tennis court, just round at the back. Do you want me or can you introduce yourself?"

"I can manage, thanks," said Marama; "excuse me a minute."

The slender white figure had hardly swung off the verandah and turned the corner of the house, when Mrs. Harte wheeled in her chair and faced her other visitor.

"Have you known her long?" she asked quickly.

"About eight weeks," replied Miss Halliday with equal celerity; "we met on the boat. She invited me to her father's plantation."

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"You can't go," said Mrs. Harte deliberately; "you don't know — it's quite impossible."

"I accepted," replied Miss Halliday a little stiffly.

"But you don't understand; she —"

"Yes, I guessed that some time ago. Human nature is my study, Mrs. Harte."

"And she has no idea of it."

"No, not the faintest."

"It's dreadful — dreadful; oh, I think it's such a cowardly thing! Stay here until the next *Amra,* Miss Halliday; it would be much better. We should be delighted to have you — we have so few visitors."

Miss Halliday blinked at the sea.

"It's very good of you, Mrs. Harte," she said, "but I accepted the invitation."

"You will witness a tragedy."

"It won't be the first," said Miss Halliday, "and — I may be of use."

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CHAPTER IV

A GLIMPSE OF HELL

THE tennis court had apparently been converted into a cricket pitch, for, as Marama opened her parasol and passed from the shade of the house into the glare of the compound, she came upon half a dozen Fijians and a white man engaged in practice at the nets.

The latter was bowling, with his back towards her, and Marama stood watching him for a moment. He was tall and powerfully yet cleanly built. His feet were bare, and his white duck trousers, rolled to the knee, showed the lean, muscular leg of the athlete. Instinctively and instantly Marama hoped that this was her brother-in-law.

His delivery of the ball was peculiar. He took a short run, crouched till his right knee almost touched the ground, then sent a slow ball curving from the back of his hand with a quick

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turn of the wrist. Marama knew enough of the game to respect that ball, but apparently the Fijian batsman did not, for he came out to it, hit blindly, and paid the penalty of a shattered wicket. Instead of pleasing the bowler, however, this exhibition of his skill had precisely the opposite effect. His long arms fell to his sides in limp despair.

"Tell him, Madri," he said, turning disgustedly to a handsome Fijian with a silk sulu and a hat, which, according to island custom, only chiefs are allowed to wear, "tell the blithering idiot that I sent that up to fetch him out, and he came like a bird. Tell him to try and play with his head as well as his bat. Tell him — I beg your pardon," he added, for the first time catching sight of his audience.

"Please don't apologise," said Marama; "he should have backed up with his pads, shouldn't he? Though I must confess I shouldn't have known what to do with it afterwards."

She could see the enthusiasm of the cricket devotee flash suddenly into the man's sunburnt face.

"Anything, almost anything but what he did.

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They take a deal of coaching, but when you once get an idea into their numb skulls, it's there for keeps, Miss —"

"Thurston," supplied Marama. "I came to find my brother-in-law, Mr. Maddon; Mrs. Harte said —"

She had expected an interruption, but none came. Instead a pause ensued, during which she noted a sudden change in the man's expression; slight, but easily definable by a woman as surprise, if not alarm. He seemed to be thinking rapidly.

"Ah, yes," he said hurriedly, "he's over there under that mango, but — you'll find him asleep, I think. I'll take you to him."

"Thank you," said Marama, "but I won't interrupt your practice."

The other made no movement, but something in his attitude restrained her.

"My name's Templeton," he said bluntly. "May I introduce Ratu Madri?"

The chief strolled forward with a leisurely nonchalance and raised his hat.

"We have met before," he said, with a marked English accent and a pleasant drawl, "though

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I don't suppose you remember it, Miss Thurston."

He was a handsome man of perhaps forty, with none of the coarseness of feature usual in the Fijian, and his sleepy brown eyes lingered on Marama's face, under its wide-brimmed straw hat, with languid appreciation.

"I can't say I do;" she replied, smiling. "I was only just now saying to Mrs. Harte that I don't seem to remember anything, except in a very vague sort of way. Won't you help me?"

"With pleasure," said Ratu Madri. "The last time we met, you were so high, Miss Thurston." He leant forward, presumably to measure the distance from the ground with his hand, but, finding the exertion too much, resumed his normal, lethargic attitude. "You were, I think, three and a half years old and I — well, I was a better cricketer than I am now."

"Then perhaps you and Fiji can find it in your hearts to forgive me," laughed Marama; but her glance was following Templeton, who had left them almost immediately and was striding rapidly towards the mango tree behind the nets.

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Ratu Madri followed the direction of her glance, and made a leisurely movement that effectually obscured her view.

"Yes, I remember it very well," he went on, still studying the girl's face with the steady scrutiny that had already begun to vaguely annoy her. "You were sitting on your father's knee on the verandah at Munia, and he was talking to Mr. Hennings — who, if you remember, took you home. I was less fortunate; I never got further than Sydney University, and it's not the same thing, not the same thing at all, Miss Thurston; but I mean to make up for it some day."

He looked away towards the house with a wistful light in his mild brown eyes, and Marama quickly seized the opportunity of shifting her position to command a better view of the mango tree. Templeton had already reached it and was vigorously shaking something white that lay in its shade. She was fully aware that Ratu Madri was talking to distract her attention, and she resented it.

"The governor has given his consent to the Fijian team visiting England," he continued in

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his pleasant drawl, "and that in itself is a triumph; the last governor . . ."

His words fell on heedless ears. The white object was still being shaken, but presently sat up, evolving itself into a man, who continued to sit, alternately rubbing his eyes and looking into the other's face with bleary interrogation. In answer to a more than usually violent tug at his trousers, he struggled to his feet and stood swaying gently while he flicked the grass from his ducks, then walked with sudden and surprising self-control out into the compound.

"I hope you'll excuse me," he said, with a well-managed smile. "Forty winks — or was it fifty — how d'you do?"

He was a small man with a fleshy, colourless face and plump little body, that irresistibly called to Marama's mind a fat, white porpoise. There was not an angle in his anatomy, nothing but soft, round curves. She loathed him on the instant.

"I came to look for you, Mr. Maddon," she said. "I hear you came to take me home. Good afternoon, Mr. Templeton — Ratu Madri, we shall probably meet again." She smiled a

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farewell and turned from them, walking towards the house with a rapidity that caused Mr. Maddon some difficulty to emulate.

Something hastened her steps; Marama hardly knew what, except that she felt a sudden, overwhelming desire to get home, away from all these people who acted so strangely.

The same vague uneasiness prompted her to glance over her shoulder before rounding the house. Templeton and Ratu Madri were now standing close together in the middle of the pitch, talking earnestly.

Mrs. Harte rose and came forward as Marama entered.

"I have been trying to steal Miss Halliday," she said, "but she has been too much for me."

"I'm glad of that," said Marama, "perhaps I'll let you have her for a day or two before the next *Amra*. Good-bye, Mrs. Harte."

Maddon had preceded them to the jetty, and when they arrived was busily engaged at the engines of a disreputable oil launch. Marama looked down at its blistered sides and unprotected propellor shaft, half submerged in oily bilge water, with a frown of disapproval that

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was not dissipated when she caught sight of her own name at the bows. Her lips were framed to speak when she checked herself, and Miss Halliday saved the situation by jumping nimbly into the stern sheets and hastily tucking her already soiled skirt under the seat.

"I love launches," she announced. "Imagine the power stored in that tiny engine. Machinery of any kind awes me. I wonder why it is women so seldom take any interest in it. I think it must be too practically intricate — and yet we like intricacies of a kind —"

"I don't think I introduced my brother-in-law, Mr. Maddon — Miss Halliday," said Marama.

Maddon raised a perspiring and slightly soiled face from the engines and bowed.

A desultory conversation ensued between them, while Marama remained thoughtfully silent. A blighting depression had descended upon her, amounting almost to dread, though of what she could not determine. She cast back over the incidents of the last few hours in search of the cause, but with only slight success. She heard, without comprehending, Miss Halli-

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day's rhapsodies over the scenery that glided by to port in an ever-changing kaleidoscope of exquisite colour, but she felt instinctively that the kindly little lady was making an effort. Why? In Heaven's name why was every one at such pains to make things easy?

The launch glided on up the coast, leaving an ugly scar on the blue mirror of the sea, past needle-like headlands of black, volcanic rock, sandy beaches where cattle stood knee-deep in the lukewarm water or browsed on the rank grass in the shade of palms and bread-fruit trees. Groves of feathery-topped cocoanut palms stretched away in uniform rows, half-way to the summit of a cloud-capped range of inland hills. Finally, with a churning of the reversed propellor, the launch came to rest beside a tumbled-down jetty.

"Look lively," snapped Maddon, addressing a gaping Solomon Island boy, who proceeded to pick his way gingerly over the rotten planking, with a boot on one naked foot and none on the other. But the ladies disembarked without his help, and picked their way along the swaying wharf in silence.

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Even Miss Halliday seemed at a loss for words. Before them lay a tiny crescent of sandy beach, and beyond it, the remains of what had once been a garden, but which was now a wilderness of rank grasses dotted with rubbish heaps of withered taro peelings, broken bottles, and empty corned-beef tins.

The bungalow was mercifully hidden by a tangle of tropical vegetation, but as the two approached it, each step revealed some fresh dilapidation — a jagged tear in the corrugated iron roof, a missing verandah post, a gaping crack in the weather-board walls.

Marama seemed to have forgotten her companion's very existence. Her lips were compressed, her gaze riveted on her home, as she walked quickly up the grass-grown path, ascended the verandah steps, and vanished into the dim interior.

Maddon, who had hurried after them, waved Miss Halliday into a chair on the verandah, with a hasty apology, and passed inside the house.

The little lady sat blinking gravely at the vivid green lizards scuttling in and out of the chinks in the floor for five — ten minutes. With

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her vivid imagination she could picture what was going on in that disreputable house. The poignancy of the revelation Marama was now facing tore at the kindly woman's heart. It recalled to her active mind an incident of long ago, when she had sat outside the door of a room where a surgical operation was being performed — an operation that meant life or death to her dearest friend. How would this young girl fare under one of the countless knives used by the great, relentless surgeon called life — "Life" who so seldom used an anæsthetic? She was young, pliable; perhaps —

A light footfall sounded behind her and she turned to see Marama standing in the doorway, looking down on her with a little white smile.

"Will you ever forgive me?" she said, in a voice that fought with itself to be natural,— "leaving you here like this. I hardly knew what I was doing."

"My dear child," chirped Miss Halliday, "family greetings and farewells are not for the public eye; please don't mention it. What a glorious view there is from this verandah, and have you noticed the lizards —?"

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"I want to speak to you somewhere alone," said Marama, with strange deliberation. "Would you mind coming down to the beach?"

The sun was sinking, blood red, into the sea, as the two women faced one another under a pandanus palm.

"I want to tell you," said Marama, looking out over the sea, and speaking in the same colourless tone, "I want to tell you that I don't know how to apologise, but Mrs. Harte was quite right; you can't stay here. I know now why she tried to keep you. This is a half-caste home; perhaps you don't understand what that means — oh, I know you'll say it makes no difference — you're like that — but I can see already that it's quite impossible. No, let me finish"; she checked the words that rushed to Miss Halliday's lips with an impatient gesture. "I made a mistake on the boat; I said that my parents were English; my father is, but my mother was a full-blooded Samoan. I have just met my sister. She is a half-caste, so am I, but I happen to be fair while she is dark. The place is not fit for — for you. I came out to tell you that Mr. Maddon will take you back to Vuna in

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the launch; it will be pleasant on an evening like this —

"But I knew it, Marama," urged Miss Halliday. "My dear child, I knew that in Suva. There is no need for me to say that it makes no difference, because there is no reason why it should make a difference."

Marama moistened her lips, and the bitterness of her smile went to the other's heart.

"Don't you see?" she said, "I — I want you to go — now; we may meet again — afterwards, but I must get used to it; I must somehow, and alone; it's the only way . . ."

Quite suddenly, and to Miss Halliday's infinite relief, Marama broke down.

"They might have told me," she sobbed; "they might have told me."

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CHAPTER V

WHICH TELLS MARAMA HER PAST AND CONSTRUCTS HER FUTURE

FOR a while Marama stood under the pandanus palm, staring after the launch as it dissolved into the gathering darkness; then she turned and slowly retraced her steps to the house.

In the living-room she paused a moment, mechanically noting the sordid surroundings; the American cloth-covered sofa, with its stuffing oozing from a three-cornered tear that a hideous antimacassar failed to hide; the oilcloth-covered table supporting a glass lamp daubed with vivid flowers; the crazy chairs; the unframed, coloured supplements arranged to hide blemishes in the plaster of the walls. Contemplation brought no ease to her overburdened heart, and she passed on through the back verandah out into the compound.

Here, round a square of rank, untended grass,

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were ranged the outbuildings of the Munia estate; a kitchen of reeds and thatch, a corrugated iron storehouse and a sprinkling of burres once occupied by overseers, but now deserted and weather-worn. A yellow light gleamed in the window of one of these. Marama crossed the compound and entered the low doorway without knocking.

In a far corner of the dim interior, on a pile of finely woven mats, lay a man, smoking a pipe and humming quietly to himself between the puffs. His age might have been anything between sixty-five and seventy-five years, but there were the indications of premature age as well as bygone good looks in his sunken features. His hands, sallow and talon-like, plucked constantly at the frayed edges of his only garment — a faded dressing-gown, and one leg was sufficiently visible to show a surface of skin mottled and scaly like a snake's — the mark of kava excess.

In the opposite corner of the room, a half-caste girl in a chintz wrapper knelt on the mats, leisurely straining some crushed yaqona root and swaying gently to the rhythm of the man's humming.

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He looked up as Marama entered, and his dim eyes brightened visibly.

"She had to go, father," she said, sitting awkwardly on the mat-strewn floor, "Mrs. Harte asked her to stop at Vuna and — she had to get back."

"Ah, that's a pity," said Mr. Thurston thickly, but with the unmistakable accent of an English gentleman.

"She's been very good," said Marama.

"Very good. I should like to have thanked her; and she ought to have seen the place — two hundred acres of three-year-old rubber — she won't see that anywhere else in Fiji. Two hundred acres . . ."

Suddenly, and without any apparent cause, the girl in the chintz wrapper giggled, and simultaneously Mr. Thurston's train of thought seemed to disperse, for he broke off abruptly and stared vacantly before him, then turned on her with piteously weak ferocity.

"How many times have I told you to stop that idiotic simpering?" he roared. "Get out! D'you hear, Moala, get out!"

The girl obeyed, her naked feet moving swiftly

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and noiselessly over the matting. She winked playfully at Marama as she slipped past her into the compound.

Mr. Thurston stretched a trembling hand towards the cocoanut-shell cup that lay at his side, and dipped it into the tanoa. The drink seemed to soothe him, for his gust of anger passed as suddenly as it had risen.

"Wonderful tipple!" he muttered, smacking his lips and stroking his grizzled beard. "What wouldn't they give for it at home, eh? No after effects; soothing, thirst-quenching, slightly numbing, but leaves the head clear — perfectly clear; they'd like it at home . . ."

The last word seemed to linger in his memory, and he nodded reflectively at the swinging lamp suspended from the ceiling.

Presently his glance left it, and travelled to his daughter.

"They've done wonders with you," he said irrelevantly, "wonders, my girl; come here."

Marama stifled a wave of revulsion and crossed the room to his side.

"Sit here," he said, his voice taking on a maudlin tenderness. "No — so; that's better,

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with the light on your face; I want to see it. There, now we can talk — after twelve years, eh?" He chuckled faintly.

"Why didn't you send for me long ago?" she asked quietly.

"Long ago!" retorted her father, "I would never have sent for you, if things had gone as I hoped."

His lean fingers caressed the silky tendrils of her hair, and Marama shrank involuntarily from their touch.

"My white daughter," he murmured proudly.

"I'm not white," she flashed in spite of herself; "I'm a half-caste — as much a half-caste as Moala. Why did you send me away and not her; why didn't you tell me? Why?"

Mr. Thurston looked vaguely alarmed.

"There, there," he stuttered, "give me time, give me time — and — and don't fluster me!" he added, with sudden petulance. "I can't think if I'm flustered, and I want to think; I want to tell you everything." His yellow hand fluttered to his forehead. "They fluster me, but you — you mustn't. Perhaps to-morrow . . ."

"No, to-night, now," said Marama firmly.

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"I've been twelve years in ignorance; it's time I knew something."

"I — detest Maddon," said her father irrelevantly, "but he married your sister and I had to do something for them. They will hate you. Oh, Maddon will hate you, but I shall leave you everything; I have always meant to; it's not much; the trees are old, but there's the rubber — two hundred acres of three-year-old —"

"You were going to tell me why you sent me away," Marama prompted desperately.

"You were white — soul and body. You were *my* child; Moala was your mother's. It used to be whisky; I felt myself going; I knew I should go — in time. That's why I sent you away. I hoped you would never see this cursed country again. No one would know over there; you would marry a white man —"

"It was the best that could be hoped for me," said Marama below her breath, but the other heard.

"Where did you hear that?" he snapped.

"It's one of the few things I remember," she answered quietly.

"You remember, eh? Well, it's as true now

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Marama sat quite still, watching him intently. *Page* 59.

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as it was then. Get a white man; a decent one if you can, but get a white man."

Mr. Thurston struggled into a sitting position and leant forward, panting with the exertion. Marama sat quite still, watching him intently, still trying to realise that this travesty of a man in a faded dressing-gown was her father, and failing utterly. She felt almost ashamed that nothing in his pitiable condition stirred her sympathy. She found him repulsive, that was all.

"Then why did you bring me back?" she asked coldly.

"I thought I was going to die; before God I did! But I can't — not yet. I'm pickled. This cursed stuff!" He spurned the tanoa with his heel and some of its contents spilled on the floor.

"Give it up," said Marama quickly.

He shook his head.

"You don't understand. I gave up the other for this; there's no going back. If I'd stuck to the other, I'd have been out of the way by now —" Again he kicked viciously at the tanoa and missed, then filled the cup and drained it at

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a draught. "You'll hear 'em say I've 'gone native,'" he went on. "Well, what if I have?" His voice rose in querulous challenge. "I've seen most of them into their graves, anyhow. There was Bauman — popped off in the store reaching up for a bolt of calico; and Cox — snuffed out like a candle under the shower. I'll give Harte another year before a coolie sends him into a fit; then what good will Vuna do him? And look at me; an old man, but never felt better in my life. And now I've got my daughter out, things will be different. She's only seventeen. I've thought it all out. She can wait three — four years; no longer though, because they dont' last; then the rubber will be bearing — two hundred acres of rubber in bearing — splendid property. I'll sell, and she can go back; they won't know over there. She'll marry a white man — and not an island white either —"

So he drivelled on, apparently oblivious of Marama's presence, until he looked up and found her gone.

An overpowering desire for the clean night air had driven her from that loathsome room, and

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she stumbled down the narrow embankment leading from the burre to the compound like one in a trance. She wanted to get away, somewhere alone, where she could think; where perhaps it would be possible to reconstruct her shattered world.

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CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH MARAMA MAKES THE BEST OF THINGS, AND MADDON IS ILLUMINATED

AT the foot of the embankment lay something white, something that melted into the darkness at her approach. Marama paid little heed. At that moment she was hardly more than an automaton, and her feet carried her mechanically towards the beach.

Here, with her arms about her knees, she sat motionless in the sand, staring out into the night. One thing was certain; she could never go back — never! Her place was here, beside one who needed her sorely. Perhaps in time she would get used to it — she must get used to it.

She saw that she must look at things from his — her father's point of view, as well as her own. He had done his best for her — more by far than most fathers would have done for a half-caste daughter, and she must do her best for

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him. Her mind travelled back over the evening's interview, and the more she pondered over it, the less cause she found to blame him. She saw that as far as his senile mind permitted, he looked upon her in the abstract, as a kind of accomplishment — the white daughter of a Samoan mother — and had given her every advantage in consequence. After all, who was she to cavil at this attitude, at anything the Fates might decree?

At the end of an hour's cold-blooded reasoning, she found the terrible numbness that had settled upon her slowly dispersing, and a feeble, but new, interest in the world already taking its place. It was a very beautiful world, and it was hers. No one could deny her that. Her mind drank in the balm of the tropical night, with its soft, warm breeze that met the cheek like a caress; its silver sea slashed with the shadows of bordering palms; its faint whisper of water-washed sand, until the silence was broken by the crunch of shingle, and she looked round to find Moala standing behind her.

"Come and sit down," Marama called to her. "Was there ever such a night?"

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The girl giggled and moved slowly over the sand towards her.

Beyond her colour, which was almost as dark as that of a full-blooded Samoan, Marama had hardly noticed this sister of hers; but now, as she sat at her side wriggling her naked toes in the sand, she watched her with newly-awakened interest. The girl was certainly beautiful, beautiful with the languorous charm of her mother's race, and obviously a child in all save years. It was more than doubtful, too, whether she could either read or write.

Her awkwardness seemed to communicate itself to her sister, for Marama found herself at a loss for words. What was there to be said? What had these two in common? If possible, she wanted to be friends; and the way had to be cleared. She went straight to the point.

"I suppose you hate me like poison, Moala," she suggested evenly.

Moala stared at this strange being in the filmy muslin frock, daintily fitting shoes and atmosphere of that other world across the sea that she had so dim a knowledge of, and the smallest interest in.

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"No," she said at last, with an expression of placid enquiry, "I don't hate you. Why?"

The question was a little disconcerting. Marama picked up a handful of sand and let it trickle through her fingers.

"You ought to," she said.

"Why?"

The query was repeated with the insistence of a child.

"I'm a year younger than you, Moala; there's no other difference between us, yet I have had everything and you nothing. Aren't you envious?"

"No," said Moala thoughtfully, and resumed boring operations with her toes.

"You don't want to go to England and learn to be a lady?"

"No."

Marama looked round at her in sheer incredulity. It came almost as a shock and certainly as a disappointment, to see this girl's evident indifference for those things she should have craved beyond all others. It had the effect of momentarily lessening their value in the eyes of their possessor; which, under the circum-

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stances, was the best possible effect it could have had.

Marama gave a little, hard laugh and looked out to sea.

"I believe you're right," she said, more to herself than her sister. "I wish I hadn't been sent. Look what I've missed. What good has it done me or anybody else? It was just silly. You can't picture it, Moala, but there were thirty of us, cooped in a big barn of a house beside the sea. Oh, it wasn't a sea like this; it was grey, and cold, and instead of lapping a sandy beach, it was held back by a breakwater called the esplanade, where people walked up and down or pushed other people in chairs on wheels."

"It must have been funny," commented Moala, with the air of one making an illuminating remark.

"Yes, it sounds funny to me — already. If we were good, we were allowed to walk up and down, too, not with the other people, but in a long string called a crocodile; or we went out into a big field in short skirts, and knocked a ball about with sticks."

"Cricket!" suggested Moala triumphantly.

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"No, hockey; I'll show you what it's like some day. Oh, I have lots to tell you. Haven't you anything to tell me? How long has dad been like this?"

"I don't know," said Moala, "years and years."

"And why did you laugh when he talked about the rubber?"

Moala giggled afresh at the remembrance.

"There isn't any rubber," she said.

"No rubber!"

"No. It was two years old when there came a blow and knocked it all down."

"Then why —"

"Frank said we'd better not tell the old man; it might worry him, and it wouldn't do any good."

"But can't he see for himself?"

Moala made a chuckling noise in her throat.

"He hasn't been outside the burre (native house) for two years," she said.

Marama stared down at the ground with a puckered brow.

"Two years," she repeated slowly. Then a thought flashed into her brain.

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"Why were you listening outside the burre to-night?" she asked quickly.

Moala slowly exhumed a large, flat foot and studied the movement of its big toe with well-simulated interest. She was in no way embarrassed.

"Frank told me to," she said.

The faint chugging of an oil launch somewhere out in the darkness put an end to further conversation, for Moala scrambled to her feet with something approaching alacrity.

"There he is," she said; "let's go in."

Exactly why Maddon's advent should necessitate this, Marama failed to see, but refrained from comment.

Her sister had prepared a room for her in the bungalow, but one glance at its bare walls and packing-case appointments was sufficient.

"Moala," she said, "you're a dear. Thank you ever so much, but — would you think it very horrid of me if I went into one of the huts?"

Moala regarded her with mild surprise.

"No," she said, "I don't care; but why?"

"You see," Marama hurried on, "I can move all these lovely things over there, and it would

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be cooler, and — you're sure it won't make any difference?"

The rest of the evening was spent in making one of the burres habitable, and when it was done, Marama stood in the middle of the tiny room and surveyed her handiwork with a touch of pride.

"I love mats," she said, "and reed walls and thatch and spliced rafters; I suppose you're used to them, Moala, but I like them much better than a bungalow."

A thought seemed to strike her, for she suddenly squatted on the mats and commenced unlacing her shoes.

"I'm going barefoot," she announced; "and bring me a wrapper, Moala; anything will do; we're about the same height. I hate this dress!" She tore viciously at the fastenings, and soon it was lying in a crumpled heap at her feet. "I'll never wear stays again," she cried, "never! And show me how you do your hair, Moala; I like it."

Her eyes shone with excitement. An almost savage recklessness was upon her. At school she had often felt the urgent need of a vent for

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the life that was in her, and had usually found one that served its purpose for the time being. It had given her a glimpse of the golden land beyond the bounds of petty convention; but here and now she knew that she was fighting a battle for freedom and peace of mind. She stood surrounded by the enemy — bitter disappointment, doubt, discontent, despair — armed to the teeth, and it remained for her to find a way out. Already she glimpsed a possible means of escape; already the long struggle towards it had begun. Could she win through?

Even Moala seemed to have caught something of her enthusiasm.

"You look fine," she said, as she coaxed her sister's unruly hair into the orthodox Samoan bun, and added the finishing touch of a broad, blue ribbon.

"I feel fine," said Marama. "How easy it is to walk!" She moved about the room, testing the freedom of her bare feet and long, loose wrapper, and came to a sudden halt before her sister.

"Moala," she said, "— what a pretty name! I like it better than mine — Moala, I want you to

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sit down here on these mats and talk to me, teach me, right from the beginning. I want you to treat me just as though I'd never left Taviuni; just as though I were a little girl, bothering you with all sorts of silly questions that you have to answer to keep me good." Her voice became grave as she went on, holding her sister's chintz wrapper in tightly clenched hands, and looking steadily into her stolid, brown face.

"I believe you think me mad, Moala; or some strange animal from a long way off. I'm neither; I'm a girl, just the very same as yourself, but with a skin that by some accident that I couldn't help is a shade lighter than yours. You think, too, that I must know everything, you nothing. It is just the other way round; you know everything I want to know — There!" she cried, when the submissive Moala had been drawn down on to the mats close beside her. "There! To begin with, however do you sit like that? Show me; lift up your wrapper and show me!"

Her tone was one of peremptory command — the same that had never failed her with her school-fellows — and Moala obeyed with a leis-

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urely tolerance. Her fat right leg was not only crossed tailor-fashion under the other, but its foot, with a horny white sole, sprouted from the bend of her left knee. It was the universal way of squatting in the islands, but to Marama it was a feat. She made a grave study of the phenomenon, and struggled valiantly with her own white feet, until she fell backwards laughing on the mats.

"Never mind now," she said. "I must practice, that's all. Everything's practice — even getting used to things. Heavens, how tough your feet are, Moala! Shall I ever be able to get mine like that?"

"You won't want to," said Moala, studying the sole of her left foot with genuine interest, for the first time in her life.

"But I do," cried Marama. "I do, indeed! Fancy being able to walk about barefoot, always. Every time we walked in a crocodile as stiff as a poker along that hateful parade at St. Leonards, I wanted to tear off my shoes and stockings and paddle — and now I can!"

"It's the reefs makes them like that," said Moala.

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"Coral reefs?"

"Yes."

"You must take me out to them to-morrow; what do you go out on them for, to paddle?"

"No, to fish; Frank likes osi, and I go and spear them."

Marama clapped her hands.

"How ripping! We'll go and spear osi to-morrow — for Frank. Is he kind to you, Moala?"

There was a pause while Moala regarded her sister with an expressionless stare of her liquid brown eyes.

"He's all right," she said presently. "He's a white man." There was a touch of pride in the assertion.

"Of course he is," laughed Marama. "I could see that, but is he kind?"

"He's all right," Moala repeated, with a hint of stubbornness.

"You do everything he tells you?"

"Yes."

"Well, why did he want you to listen outside the burre to-night?"

"I dunno," lied Moala glibly.

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"So that you could tell him what you heard, I suppose. Are you going to?"

Moala wriggled on the mats and made a movement to rise, but Marama put out a restraining hand.

"Never mind," she said; "never mind, Moala; I won't ask any more questions like that." She drummed her clenched hands impatiently on the matting. "But I do wish you'd wake up and tell me things — other things that I want to know so badly. What does it feel like to be you?"

The question had evidently never before presented itself to Moala's unimaginative mind. Marama watched its slow gropings reflected in her sister's face.

"It feels — all right," she said presently.

Marama could have beaten the air with her clenched fists. Instead, she moved nearer to her sister's side.

"Don't you see, Moala?" she said gently. "I want to be like you. I want to be placid and contented and — and don't-carified. Are you always like this? Don't you ever feel you want to do things?"

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"I *do* do things," protested Moala, with an ample pout.

"Yes, but desperate things. Have you no ambition, no hopes, no disappointments? Don't you feel sometimes that you could fly to the moon, and sometimes that you want to kill yourself?"

Moala shook her bewildered head. Marama sat back on her heels and regarded her wistfully.

"You lucky girl, Moala!" she said.

Moala giggled.

Maddon was taking off his boots on the back verandah when at last his wife said good night to her sister and crossed the compound to the bungalow.

"Well?" he said.

She seemed not to hear him, and passed through to their bedroom. Her husband followed in his socks.

"Well?" he repeated.

"She's gone into one of the burres," said Moala; "she says she likes it better than the bungalow."

Maddon grunted.

"Did they talk?"

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"Yes."

"Well?" He stopped in the process of unbuckling his belt.

Moala continued to extract apparently endless pins from her glossy black hair.

"Well?" he repeated impatiently.

"The old man told her he detests you," said Moala, as though talking of the weather, "but he had to do something for you because you married me."

Maddon received this piece of information with complete equanimity.

"Tell me something I didn't know," he said.

Moala proceeded to do so.

"He said he was going to leave her everything, and she could go home and marry a white man."

"Ah."

Maddon sat on the edge of the huge, mat-strewn bed and contemplated a German print of Queen Alexandra on the opposite wall.

"Is that all?" he queried presently.

"Yes," said Moala, "that's all."

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CHAPTER VII

UPON A BOAT'S CREW AND ITS COMPOSITION

TO the natives of Taviuni, Milton Craig was "the mad Turaga," [1] a white man of strangely restful habits, living alone in his bungalow, apparently for no other purpose than to shoot, play cricket, swim, and gaze out over the sea. Deeper than this in their opinion of him he had never troubled to probe.

To the white inhabitants, he was just "Mr. Templeton," another of the multitude of seemingly cultured young men who, from time to time, mysteriously appear on the beaches of Fiji and as mysteriously vanish.

At four o'clock in the morning he rolled out of bed, lit the kerosene stove and left the kettle to boil, while he strolled down the beach in a towel and a solar topee. At the water's edge he discarded the towel, wallowed out to the reef and wallowed back again, by which time the kettle

[1] Gentleman.

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was usually boiling. After making himself a pot of tea and grilling a couple of saqa, he carried his breakfast on to the verandah and ate it, still in the towel, while minah birds strutted about his feet, fighting for crumbs.

He had done all this exactly three hundred and sixty-five times during the past year and the year before that, except for a month's bout with dengue, and if outward appearances go for anything, it seemed to have agreed with him.

This morning he felt particularly lazy after the swim and grilled saqa, and sat with his bare elbows on the table, chin on hands, looking out over three delicate shades of green that marked respectively the shallows near shore, the coral reef half a mile out, and the deep water beyond.

But Templeton (as we will also call him) saw none of this exquisite colouring. His gaze went out beyond it, covering league on league of heaving, sun-kissed, wind-swept waters, to feast on a vision of city lights reflected on wet pavements, the glare of theatre porticos, and a cool, drenching rain. The very boom of the surf on the reef merged into the beating of cab-horses' hoofs on asphalt and the roar of wheeled traffic.

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He sighed unconsciously, then, seeming to realise the lapse, shook himself back to wakefulness, thereby disturbing the toilet of a minah bird on his left shoulder.

He had reached the stage in his daily routine when it was necessary to shoot more saqa, and his hand was already up-stretched towards the rifle on the wall, when it wandered, as though drawn by some unseen force, to a jacket that hung beside it, and feeling in the breast pocket, drew out a carte-de-visite photograph.

Templeton studied it with a frown of annoyance for a full minute. At a glance there was no mistaking the face it presented. The broad, high forehead, the wide-set eyes, the determined chin were all identical. The beard and moustache were wanting, but these were the sole differences between the face in the photograph and his own.

He thrust it impatiently from sight, took down the rifle, and passed out into the blazing sunlight of the beach.

A native girl was wading knee-deep along the water's edge, stopping now and then to throw and examine a casting net. A light blue wrap-

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per hung loose from her shoulders and, trailing behind her in the water, hid yet hinted at the grace of line and movement beneath it.

"Sayadra," Templeton called cheerily and waved his disengaged hand, but a moment later was standing transfixed in the sand. The girl had looked up, and it was Marama Thurston.

"Sayadra," she laughed, "though I haven't the least idea what it means."

"I — I beg your pardon," he stammered, raising his battered solar topee, "I thought — I mistook you at a distance for —"

"A native," she finished for him. "Don't apologise; you were right — up to a certain point."

There was no bitterness in the words, but Templeton still showed his embarrassment and she hurried on.

"I hope I'm not trespassing, but this net is perfectly fascinating, and I wander on and on. I've caught the weirdest things; you can hardly call them fish — for instance, what's this?"

She held out a fat black slug for inspection.

"That's *beche-de-mer*," he told her, "good eating, though it doesn't look it."

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"I must try it," said Marama; "and this?"

"A troca shell — sixteen pounds a ton delivered in Suva. They make buttons out of them. It's quite as good as mother-of-pearl."

Marama laughed and came out on to the sand.

"I mustn't go on," she said; "if I once start asking questions, there's no end to them."

Templeton seated himself with his rifle across his knees.

"Please do," he said, "it makes me feel useful, and it's refreshing."

"Then as a rule . . ."

"As a rule I feel what I am, the most supremely useless person on the face of the earth."

"But what a terrible state to get into."

"Isn't it?"

"Especially when you can bowl as I saw you bowling at Vuna."

He laughed at that.

"It wasn't so much the bowling as the batsman," he said; "Ratu Madri can lift me all over the place; but what about these questions?"

"First and foremost," said Marama, "I want to know what that tower's for at the end of the jetty; it's been worrying me a lot."

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"Sorry for that," he answered, "because I made it. I was just going there. If you care to come, I'll soon show you what it's for."

They were strolling side by side over the wet sand, just bared by the receding tide, when Templeton stopped.

"You've cut your foot," he said peremptorily.

A flush mounted to Marama's face.

"It's nothing," she answered quickly, and walked on.

He looked down at her with a slightly puzzled scrutiny.

"If you cut it on coral," he said, "you may find that it will be something. Perhaps you don't know that coral is poisonous?"

There was a short pause before Marama answered him.

"I'm getting used to things," she said; "and my feet will have to with the rest of me."

Apparently Templeton was satisfied with this enigmatic explanation, for he accepted it without comment, and they picked their way along the jetty, and climbed the trellis-work tower in silence.

Below them, the emerald green water lay

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limpid and transparent as glass. From the forty-foot height of the tower the sea-floor, with its delicate fronds of coral, swaying weeds and quivering globules of sunlight, showed with an almost uncanny distinctness, whilst tiny, brightly-hued fish hovered as though suspended in air, or darted into coral crannies with a flash of vivid blue or crimson.

Marama caught her breath in wonderment. Templeton stood with his rifle under his arm, straining his eyes out over the glaring waters to where a brown patch, like the shadow of a cloud, moved slowly shoreward.

"Don't move," he said; "here they come!" Then he raised the rifle and fired.

There was a faint plock, and the brown cloud dispersed, leaving the bodies of three fish floating belly upward in the water. Templeton climbed quickly down the ladder, dived from the jetty and collected his bag.

"You have to be fairly nippy," he explained, wading out on to the beach where Marama awaited him with the rifle. "It only stuns them for a minute or two — two osi and a saqa — that's what my tower is for, Miss Thurston."

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"Thank you for the demonstration," said Marama; "it's splendid sport."

"It's not sport at all," he objected; "it's like everything else in this infernal paradise of a place — too easy. But you'd better come up to the verandah and have a cup of tea?"

Marama went. She wanted a cup of tea badly, and it was impossible to be anything but natural with this big, brown boy; for that was how she had classified him.

From the hammock on the verandah she could hear the kerosene stove being lit, then the crackle of starched linen as her host struggled into dry ducks. Presently he appeared in the doorway, a clean, upstanding, everyday Englishman.

"That's not fair," she protested, holding wide her soaking wrapper, "Look at me!"

"I had to do something to celebrate the occasion," he defended. "Perhaps you don't know you're the first lady to visit 'Cadogan Mansions?'"

He flung himself into a wicker chair, and turned towards her with sudden eagerness.

"It's my turn for questions," he said. "'How's London?"

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For acute reasons Marama found the sudden question disconcerting.

"Very well, thank you," she answered hurriedly; "that is, as much of it as I could see."

"Fog?"

Templeton was leaning over the arm of his chair.

"We had to grope our way to Tilbury."

"Heavens!" he burst out. "What wouldn't I give to see a genuine pea-souper again? I'd go out and walk into lamp-posts with a fiendish joy; breathe it, taste it, grovel in it." His eyes became fixed as those of one who sees a vision. "I want to take a penny omnibus — it would be a motor one now, I suppose — and see Kingsway, and Aldwich, and the new Gaiety. I haven't seen any of them. I never shall see any of them . . ." He stopped abruptly, with the air of one who has said more than he intended. There was a furtive look in his grey eyes as he turned them swiftly on Marama.

"You must excuse the babblings of a hermit, Miss Thurston, but perhaps you understand."

"I do," said Marama, "I quite understand; but why will you never see it all again?"

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The question was too natural to be impertinent, yet Templeton frowned and studied his finger nails.

"I can't," he said.

The hissing of the kettle seemed to come as a relief. He sprang to his feet and went into the house, returning presently with the tea on a home-made table. A whimsical smile played about his mouth as he negotiated the tinned milk and sugar.

"I believe you love London," he said accusingly.

"I don't; I hate it," retorted Marama.

"Well, home then?"

"Taviuni is my home."

"You mean that you persuade yourself that it is."

Marama felt his eyes upon her. She wanted to say something cutting, something that would prevent him from reading her as she knew he was at that moment. But somehow the words failed to come.

"I mean," she said deliberately, "that Taviuni is my home — whether I want it to be or not."

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"I told myself that when I first came here," said Templeton, absently stirring his cup. "I asked myself what more a man wanted than God's sunlight, the sea, three meals a day, a bed, and cricket. I even persuaded myself that I was satisfied with it — I got that far, Miss Thurston — but —" He shook his head wearily. "It's not a particle of use; there are the other things, and it's no good trying to shut one's ears to them, because they call and keep calling, louder and louder, until . . ."

"Until what?" Marama was leaning forward deeply interested.

"One must either obey or — or go mad."

"How horrible!"

Templeton's strong brown hands were clasped between his knees.

"That's just what it is," he said gravely, "horrible."

There was a long pause, then he looked up with the same whimsical smile.

"I don't know why I'm afflicting you with all this," he said. "I don't remember whining before. I think it must be because we're in much the same boat, Miss Thurston."

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Marama threw out her hands with a little gesture of impatience.

"No," she said; "we're not in the same boat, Mr. Templeton. We never could be, because you are white, and I am half-caste — oh, I know it's brutal," she added, for he had winced. "I know it's plain talking, but I've wanted to talk plainly to some one for days — some one who would understand — and I saw Ratu Madri telling you all about me on the tennis court at Vuna. I seem to have heard him saying; 'You'd never think it, would you? Some of them are fairer than your women,'— of course I did not know then, but —"

"You didn't know?"

"I hadn't the faintest idea until I reached Munia."

"Good God!"

Marama looked into his horrified face and laughed.

"Yes," she said, "it was quite as bad as that at the time, but now — I don't know that I care. There were two kinds of life open to me, the white and the brown. I chose the brown, or I shouldn't be on your verandah drinking tea, and

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"It's a half-caste girl's one aim in life, you know." *Page* 89.

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talking as though I had known you all my life, as I am now. And having chosen the brown," she threw back her head with an air of defiance, "I mean to go through with it. I wonder if you can give a guess at the height of my ambition at the present moment?"

Templeton glanced up at the flushed face without answering.

"To marry a white man," she ended triumphantly, "a decent one if I can, but a white man. It's a half-caste girl's one aim in life, you know."

She derived an unaccountable but savage satisfaction from shocking this man who understood.

"You're talking wildly," he said, "and you're not fair to yourself. You're no more brown in mind or body than I am, if as much. You're a little unsettled at present, and no wonder, but —"

"I was never more settled in my life," she corrected untruthfully.

Templeton shook his head.

"You wait," he said; "I thought that too."

"But I don't intend to wait; I mean to go straight on as I am now."

"So did I."

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Marama stamped a small, naked foot on the bare boards of the verandah.

"Can't you see that our cases are not parallel?" she demanded. "What's the good of pretending? I, at least, am not going to. I started life all over again a week ago. It's good enough for me. I'm not going back now."

Templeton stared at the floor in silence.

"Of course I've no earthly right to advise," he said presently, "but I have been through the mill, and I have seen a good deal of the life out here, and it seems to me if there is a possible loophole of escape —"

"But if there isn't?" Marama objected.

Templeton shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Of course," he said, "I know nothing of your affairs."

"I'll tell you them — no, I want to, if you don't mind. You know my father?"

"I have met Mr. Thurston." The reply came haltingly to Templeton's lips, despite his effort to make it colourless and commonplace.

"And you know Mr. Maddon?"

"Yes."

"And you've been over Munia?"

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"Yes."

"Well, those are my affairs, so you see you do know them. Now what do you think of my loophole of escape?"

Marama laughed, and there was a strident note in it that jarred on Templeton. He gathered up one knee and stared over it at the sea.

"I wish mine were half as negotiable," he said, then suddenly turned and faced her.

"Look here," he said with grave earnestness, "if I can ever be of any use, will you let me?"

It was a frank offer, made as though by one man to another, and Marama accepted it in the same spirit.

"I will," she said, "and thank you."

When she had gone, Templeton stood grasping the verandah railing and watching the retreating blue wrapper.

"It's too bad," he muttered, "too damned bad!"

Then he went into the house to grill more saqa.

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CHAPTER VIII

RATU MADRI, CRICKETER AND PHILOSOPHER

MARAMA'S cut foot hurt abominably, but she still waded on, finding comfort in the fact that a week ago it was all she could do to hobble barefoot across the Munia compound. Also it no longer gave her headaches to go without a hat, and by assiduous exposure to the sun, her skin was taking on the creamy brown tint she had set her heart on acquiring. Then Moala had shown her how to make kava for her father; how to weave mats as fine as a panama hat, and cook fish wrapped in banana leaf on hot stones in the ground.

She was "getting used to things," and what was more, finding them vastly entertaining. Why then should this mysterious hermit of "Cadogan Mansions" try to dissuade her from living her own life? It was almost an impertinence, and yet — she could not bring herself to look upon it in that light. Moreover, she was

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conscious of another self, deep within her, and acquiescent in everything he had said. This was vaguely disquieting, and, by reason of its very vagueness, doubly annoying.

The reason for the man's attitude was not so hard to define. Pity — that was it! He pitied her because he pitied himself and liked to fancy them both "in the same boat." Marama resolved to show him his mistake plainly, and at the first possible opportunity.

These rather disjointed reflections were brought to an abrupt termination when she rounded a curve in the beach and came upon a party of Fijians at cricket practice on the wet sand.

Ratu Madri, whom she instantly recognised by his hat, was batting, or rather standing with his splendid legs apart, hitting the full pitches sent up by an obliging bowler with terrific force into the long field, where a scattered semicircle of shock-headed fieldsmen awaited catches with an eagerness bordering on fear — and not without cause. The ball had been missed twice, through sheer nervousness, when Ratu Madri leant on the bat and beckoned the two culprits

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to approach. They did, crouching low, as etiquette demands from a Fijian towards his chief, and he spoke a few leisurely words that gave no hint of the lightning rapidity with which he swung the bat above his head as though to strike. But the men never flinched.

Whether the blow would have fallen, it is impossible to say, for at that very moment the tail of Ratu Madri's mild brown eye caught the flash of a blue wrapper against the glistening sand.

"Go back," he said to the bowed figures before him, "but catch the next, if you have to do it with your teeth." Then, turning to the wicket-keeper, a grizzled Tongan with a face like crumpled brown paper. "Who is that woman? Tell her to go — stop!"

The countermand came so swiftly that the Tongan had not moved, and a charming smile supplanted the frown on Ratu Madri's face as he sauntered towards Marama, hat in hand.

"This is a pleasant surprise, Miss Thurston," he drawled.

His eyes travelled over her in a leisurely, half-amused scrutiny before resting on the net in her hand.

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"I see our poor little Fiji is already beginning to interest you."

Marama found it difficult to disengage her mind from the scene she had just witnessed. It lingered with a peculiar vividness.

"Interest!" she managed to exclaim. "There is so much interest in everything and everyone I don't know where to begin. I feel like a walking note of interrogation."

Ratu Madri laughed, and it was a pleasant, easy sound.

"How can you call Fiji poor or little," she went on. "You must remember, she's mine as well as yours."

"I like to hear you say that," he said; "I was afraid —"

"Afraid of what?"

"That you would find us dull after — your travels; that you would want to get back — over there." He nodded out to sea.

"I shall never go back," said Marama.

Ratu Madri looked down at her for a moment in thoughtful silence.

"This is good news," he said gravely. "Fiji thanks you for the compliment. But which way

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were you going? May I take you in the launch?"

"I shall interrupt the cricket."

"Not at all; the team can practice out-fielding without me — a most important department of the game and usually a badly neglected one, Miss Thurston."

"It seems to be," laughed Marama. It was on the tip of her tongue to mention the incident that prompted the assumption, but she refrained.

This tall man, with the picturesque silk sulu and courtly manner, awed her, though she would have been the last to admit it.

Ratu Madri had given some signal — for no order had passed his lips — yet three men ran down the stretch of shining sand and awaited them knee-deep in the water, beside a neat, white dinghy. Almost before she realised it, Marama found herself in the arms of a stalwart Fijian, who carried her like a child to the dingy and deposited her with extreme care in the stern sheets. From here she watched the chief's more dignified embarkation with mingled amusement and interest. One of his servants awaited him on the sand, crouched after the manner of a

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camel, while Ratu Madri climbed leisurely on to his back and suffered himself to be borne out and deposited at her side.

"Well?" he demanded, with an amused smile.

"I didn't say anything," she replied quickly.

"No, but you wanted to. If you confess to being a walking note of interrogation, please consider me an encyclopedia."

Marama laughed.

"Thank you," she said. "I was only wondering why, when we are both barefoot, it was necessary for us to be carried. That's all."

But Ratu Madri apparently failed to see any humour in the incident; in fact, he frowned, whilst twisting a gigantic signet ring round the little finger of his left hand.

"You will find, Miss Thurston," he said, in his slow precise drawl, "that here in Fiji we have a number of customs — Europeans call them relics of barbarism — that on the surface may appear trivial, even ludicrous; but when you have been with us a little longer, you will understand, and see that they are neither, but the outward expression of something very deep-rooted; so deep-rooted that forty years of so-called civili-

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sation have failed — and another five hundred will fail — to weaken its hold on the Fijian people. I mean reverence for their hereditary chief."

Coming from any other source, this pedantic utterance would have been almost laughable, but there was something about Ratu Madri that forbade ridicule; moreover, Marama felt instinctively that he spoke the truth, and took it as a rebuke.

"I see," she said rather lamely; "then why did they carry me?"

"Because you are with Ratu Madri," the chief answered quietly, without a flicker of a smile.

Marama digested this rather startling piece of information in silence, while they transhipped to a speckless launch, and the wrinkled Tongan attended to the engines.

Ratu Madri leant towards her.

"I know what you're thinking," he said. "You're saying to yourself, 'The conceit of it!' — but it's not conceit; it is merely a fact, and I am as powerless to alter it as you or any one else. Sometimes I almost wish that I could."

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He leant back among the cushions, lost in contemplation of his magnificent calves.

Marama was still silent, and presently he continued:

"I also know what you thought when you came upon me just now coaching my cricketers, though you hid your feelings admirably; and perhaps this will show you what I mean. I daresay you noticed those two butter-fingers clapping their hands when I had done with them — you did? Well, that may have looked ridiculous, but it was the tama, a custom as old as these hills we are passing. It means, 'You are my father; do with me as you will.' So, I am their father, whether I wish it or no, and they are my children, actually, for in mind the Fijian is nothing more to the day of his death, and — a spoilt child is an abomination. Oh, I could tell you some funny things, but you are hardly ripe for them yet. Down in Suva there are thirteen excellent gentlemen who call themselves the Legislative Assembly, and take themselves very seriously, because they think they rule this Fiji of ours." He laughed softly. "I rule Fiji; in spite of the Legislative Assembly, in spite of

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myself, and I rule her in the only possible way — the way she understands. You see the responsibility? You see the inevitableness of it? Does it help you to think less hardly of me, Miss Thurston?"

Marama saw that the man felt what he said. She had never thought his lethargic nature capable of the earnestness she now saw reflected in his face. She wondered vaguely why he was telling her these things, and trailed her hand in the sparkling water that rippled past the sides of the launch.

"Why ask," she said, "when you know that it doesn't make the slightest difference to you what I think?"

Ratu Madri made a movement as though he were going to speak, but apparently changed his mind and drew a cigar from his immaculately starched jacket.

"I wonder if you would come and have lunch with me at Bau," he suggested irrelevantly, "I can land you at Munia half an hour afterwards, if you like."

Marama saw no reason why she should not. It was very pleasant gliding through the cool

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water in the company of this intensely interesting man. Besides, it was something of an honour. She had heard how few people knew anything of Ratu Madri's home life on Bau, the old-time capital of Fiji. If she was ever to know anything of this fascinating homeland of hers, the opportunity was here and not to be missed. She could not, however, repress the smile that came to her lips a moment after accepting the invitation, and Ratu Madri's quick eye caught it.

"I was only wondering," she said, in answer to the unspoken question in his eyes, "what my old schoolmistress would think of me at the present moment."

"She would object, perhaps?"

"Object! I think she would have hysterics."

"Poor lady," sighed Ratu Madri; "but you are no longer at her school, Miss Thurston."

"No, that's just it," laughed Marama. "Oh, I could tell you some funny things, too, Ratu Madri! We learnt all sorts of parlor tricks over there. You would hardly believe the absurdity of some of them." She looked thoughtfully and rather sadly, out over the water.

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"They were trivial and had nothing deep-rooted about them. Just as if it mattered how we shook hands, so long as others knew that we were glad to see them. Just as if it made a particle of difference how we held our skirts or did our hair, so long as it suited us. But good gracious! How could you be expected to understand it all when I didn't. I once asked them what it was all for, and they could only tell me that this was correct, and that incorrect. Then I asked who had said so, and they didn't seem to know."

Ratu Madri smiled at his calves.

"Perhaps I understand better than you think," he said. "I went to Sydney University — I think I told you — and I, too, have remained unchanged — at heart."

Marama felt she could hardly let this pass. Ratu Madri was taking entirely too much for granted.

"Ah, I didn't say that," she defended. "I left home when I was four, you must remember. It would be impossible for those twelve years not to have affected me; they are my life, almost, so far."

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Ratu Madri flung his half-smoked cigar into the sea.

"No," he said firmly, "they were not your life. I will tell you why — some day."

"Why not now?"

He smiled with an easy tolerance.

"Shall we say after lunch?" he suggested. "Here is Bau."

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CHAPTER IX

THE RATU PUTS MATTERS IN A NEW LIGHT

A NATIVE outrigger canoe shot from some hidden cove in the island, poled by a girl of perhaps fifteen, straight and lissom as a larch, a white sulu wound about her from waist to knee, her hair ornamented with red hibiscus blossoms.

Suddenly she caught sight of them and hastily put back to shore with the news, so that when they landed a cortège of silently obsequious natives was waiting to escort them through the village.

Naked children who a moment before had been playing in the shade of the bread-fruit trees, scattered to their houses like startled rabbits, and brown faces peered cautiously from low, dark doorways as Ratu Madri led the way down a palm-bordered avenue to the house.

To Marama there was something sinister in the suddenness with which all life, all sound

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seemed to melt before them. It reminded her of the passage of a cloud before the sun; but all such thoughts were dispersed when she stood on the verandah of the house, a rambling place of the bungalow pattern, set on an embankment of velvety greensward falling sheer to the sea.

"It's glorious," she said, "simply glorious!"

The dining-room in itself was a feast of delight after the sordid surroundings of Munia. The floor was covered with spotless matting. Comfortable chairs held out inviting arms on all sides. The brilliant sunlight, subdued to a restful gloom by bamboo blinds, lent an added air of mystery to walls hung with every description of picture and nicknack, from water-colour landscapes to necklaces of sharks' teeth and Fijian war clubs. A piano stood in one corner, and in another, bookshelves supported equally well the latest novel and the oldest of tambuas,[1] the whole producing a mingled atmosphere of past and present, barbarism and culture, truly bewildering in its contrasts.

For some reason Ratu Madri dispensed with

[1] Whales' teeth.

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the table, and places were laid on a finely-woven mat in the middle of the floor in true Island fashion. Cocoanut-shell drinking cups of oyster soup, prawns, turtle steak, roast duck and mealy taro root, all showing perfection in cooking, were served silently and well by a constant stream of brown retainers; while behind each of the diners stood an attendant waving a palm-leaf fan.

During the meal Ratu Madri talked leisurely on a multitude of topics, but avoided any reference to their conversation of the morning, and Marama listened with an absorbed interest. The meal ended, he lit a cigar and seated himself at the piano, while his guest lay back on the cushion-strewn divan, abandoning herself to the luxury of the moment. If this was "getting used to things," she told herself, then the task was accomplished. She had never felt more completely at her ease, more thoroughly content with this new world of hers.

It was the music that called her to a sense of the present. It was like nothing she had ever heard before. It had no air, and no defined motif — this and its barbaric metre were its

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She felt herself swaying to the rhythm of it. *Page* 107.

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chief charms — but its effect upon her was strangely familiar. She felt herself swaying to the rhythm of it, her hands making little impotent gestures that she *felt* to be impotent. Something within her, she knew, was struggling for expression, just as it had struggled at school, and found vent in "the dance." It was tantalizing, absurd, and in the midst of it her glance caught that of Ratu Madri. He was smiling as he played, and she knew that he had seen. The knowledge brought the colour to her cheeks. She could not rest quietly any longer, but rose and crossed the room to his side.

"What was that?" she asked, to cover her confusion. "It was pretty."

"You think so?" he answered, fixing her with his steady gaze. "It was an experiment, Miss Thurston."

"An experiment?"

"Yes, I wondered if I could prove what I said in the launch. I have, beyond question."

"I don't think I quite understand."

"Probably not; but you may remember that you said those twelve years in England were 'your life — so far;' I have just proved for my

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own satisfaction, and I hope yours, that they are nothing of the sort."

A sudden light seemed to dawn on Marama.

"You mean —"

"I mean," said Ratu Madri, getting to his feet and walking slowly up and down the room. "I mean that what I have just been playing is one of the oldest meke (dance) chants in Samoa — and you were dancing it in spite of yourself. Some of your movements were perfectly correct."

He paused, then continued:

"I mean that your life is not that which you have been forced to live, but that which lives within you — in your blood. The blood of your ancestors." Again he stopped in his stride, and faced her. "Have you any idea who your mother was, Miss Thurston?"

Marama shook her head. Ratu Madri laughed.

"I thought not. You have never troubled to ask. Your father was all that mattered, in spite of his being — what he is. It is curious, but it is the way. Your mother was Andi Marama, Miss Thurston. That conveys nothing to you, I suppose, but it means this: that you are the

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daughter of a lady of high birth, who was foolish enough to elope with your father. For years she was the most beautiful woman in Fiji. For years she led the state meke with her incomparable dancing. Does that tell you that I was right?"

"I don't know," Marama murmured; "it has come so suddenly; I want to think."

Ratu Madri looked down at her with an ironical smile.

"Yes, think," he said, "think very carefully, for you have to choose which path you will follow. That of a dissolute wreck of an Englishman, or a lady of birth and attainments. But remember this, that whatever you decide, it will make no difference to your place in the hearts of the Fijian people. It is as assured, as inevitable as mine. The mataqali (tribe) never forgets."

A sudden desire to be gone seized on Marama. She had wanted to live her own life, and now that it confronted her, she was a little frightened.

Ratu Madri noticed the change.

"I want you to see Fiji — not as a tourist; not even as a European, but —"

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"As a half-caste," Marama ended, with a sudden flash of defiance.

Ratu Madri turned aside and straightened some books on a side table before replying.

"No," he said, "as my wife."

Marama had risen to go, and now stood stone still before him, speechless with amazement. Presently she became aware that he was still speaking.

". . . I don't want you to say anything now. I want you to go away and think it all over. You will let me know in time. I hope I haven't frightened you, but I am not in the habit of beating about the bush, and I had made up my mind on the tennis court at Vuna. My man will land you at Munia . . ."

A few minutes later she found herself in the launch, a spray-laden wind playing on her face, and her thoughts keeping time to the throbbing of the engines.

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CHAPTER X

MARAMA MAKES A DISCOVERY AND AN ENEMY

THAT night she lay awake staring unseeingly at the dim starlight that filtered through the open doorway of the burre. Here was she suddenly confronted, not with the vague loophole of escape towards which she had been so assiduously fighting her way for the past week, but with a portal open wide to let her pass. But what lay beyond? Would she be the prisoner forcing the door of his cell to find himself in the prison yard, surrounded by unscalable walls? And the door would be closed behind her; there was no return, even to the prison roof. She would be forced to shiver there in the cold and the darkness and take her punishment, whatever it might be. What lay beyond?

It was impossible to sleep. She slid from the bed and stood in the burre doorway looking up at the stars, until something attracted her attention across the compound — something dimly

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white and low down, moving rapidly towards the bush road that led to the coolie lines.

She struck a match and looked at her watch. It was one o'clock. Hardly knowing why, but welcoming movement in any form, she slipped dew-laden grass touched her feet, but turned briskly down the bush track and followed it on her wrapper. She shivered slightly when the until the murmur of voices fell on her ears, and a faint, yellow light flickered through the trees. She moved on more slowly, until, at the edge of the clearing, where loomed the familiar outline of the copra shed and drying yards; she crouched behind a bush and peered out on a scene so weirdly fantastic that it seemed to her she must be dreaming.

The clearing, lit by half a dozen oil flares, was alive with bustling activity. The copra shed doors were open wide, and in and out of them passed scurrying coolies, panting and sweating under their heavy burdens.

Maddon, clad in pyjama trousers and a vest, moved tirelessly among them, spitting Hindustani and buffeting them with his clenched hands. He carried a stock whip, but Marama

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only saw him use it once, when she hid her face in her hands. What did it all mean? Was the work of Munia carried on at night? Where did the coolies go?

She got to her feet, and skirting the clearing, darted through the cocoanut groves towards the beach. Here were no oil flares; only a copra punt moored a few yards from shore and loaded high with bulgent sacks. The endless procession of coolies came and went, wading waist-deep into the water, depositing their loads, and vanishing up the bush track. One tripped and fell. Marama heard a muttered oath, the dull sound of blows, and Maddon panted past within a foot of her.

Presently it was over. The stream of coolies ceased to ebb and flow. A few manned the copra punt, and poled it silently out into the darkness. The oil flares were extinguished. The clearing lay star-lit and deserted, and Marama picked her way back to the burre with fluttering breath.

It had all been so rapid, so transient, that in the morning she could hardly bring herself to believe that it had ever happened.

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Maddon did not appear at breakfast, and after it she saw him sprawling, ghastly pale, in a wicker chair on the verandah, while Moala squatted below him slowly waving a palm-leaf fan. He still wore the pyjama trousers — striped blue and green — and a dirty white vest; there could be no mistake.

For a moment she was of a mind to question him openly there and then, but on second thought passed him by with a smile and a nod which he returned with a palpable effort.

What ailed him? She wondered, as she continued on her way. The thought of the man filled her with intensified loathing. How could Moala have married him? How could she sit there now, fanning him like a slave? Did she love him or fear him? Or both, like a dog? One thing was certain, she, Marama, would never learn these things from her sister's lips. For the first time it occurred to her that Moala's stolid exterior might hide emotions as burning as her own.

Down at the drying yards the copra shed doors were still open. A pyramid of sacks, tightly packed, sewn and branded, ready for ship-

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ment filled one corner of the dim, pungent interior; in another stood the scales, and close by stood a rough, wooden desk supporting balls of twine and what not. In a drawer below, Marama found a dirty, battered book, which on inspection revealed itself as the weighing-in ledger. Her finger ran swiftly down the untidy columns: "Task 200 lbs." she read at the head of each; then: "Bipat — 200. Buldeo — 200. Ram Sing — 200 . . ."

Presently she closed the book and went out into the dazzling sunshine of the drying yards.

A Hindoo woman was lifting the corrugated iron coverings from the vatas, and spreading out the cocoanut kernels in readiness for the sun to do its work. She stared open-mouthed at the apparition in the blue wrapper, then, with a muttered "Salaam mem sahib," continued her task.

"Salaam," Marama answered; "do you speak English?"

The woman looked up again and smiled blandly. She was picturesque, dirty, and quite useless on the present occasion Marama decided, so passed on to the lines.

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Here she met with no better success. The men had already gone out to work, and the long, low buildings of tarred weather-board and corrugated iron that housed the twelve Indians indentured to the Munia estate were deserted, save for a few women who, with tinkling bangles and anklets, moved about the compound, or scoured cooking utensils in the earth outside their doors.

None of them spoke a word of English.

It was the same out in the plantation, and Marama went from one to another of the half-naked coolies, engaged in collecting the fallen nuts, or splitting them open with an axe, without success, until she came to a wrinkled Brahman, squatting at the foot of a palm, scooping out the milk-white kernels with methodical dexterity.

He shook his head in answer to her oft-repeated question, but in sheer desperation Marama pursued her enquiries.

"Your task," she said; "how much copra?"

He blinked at her enquiringly, then burst into voluble Hindustani. A man would probably have given up the task in despair, but Marama went through an elaborate pantomime, pointing

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first at the man, then at the pile of kernels by his side; then at the sun, describing its course in the heavens with a sweeping gesture of the arm, and was rewarded by the sudden dawn of comprehension in the other's face. He repeated her movements with gusto, and ended by getting laboriously to his feet and scratching his answer on the palm trunk with his copra knife —"300."

It was all that was necessary. The Indian coolie understands figures, however ignorant he may be of the English language, and the thing was now as clear to Marama as the sunlight streaming through the maze of palm trunks before her. She only blamed herself for waiting so long to verify a suspicion that had been growing daily stronger ever since her arrival at Munia.

Her brother-in-law was a thief. He had been consistently robbing a helpless old man — her father, and it rested with her to put an end to it.

She sat on a fallen palm trunk and tried to think what she should do, but all that came to her mind was a wish that comes to most women at some time in their lives — if only she were a man! She saw at once the futility of telling

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her father; besides, there was Moala to think of.

She was still sitting there when Maddon came upon her. His round, pale face, seemingly proof against the glare of a tropical sun, creased into a smile as he reined in his horse and dismounted.

"Having a look round?" he queried lightly.

Marama nodded. Suddenly she realised that beyond disliking him on sight, she knew next to nothing about this man. On the few occasions she had met him, at the morning and evening meal and once or twice in the compound, she had noticed that he appeared anxious to be friendly. That was all. How would he act? What would a man of this type do under the circumstances? She had a vague idea, got from novels, that men usually blanched and staggered backwards when confronted with their crimes.

"Well, you're not looking too cheerful on it, anyway," he observed, taking a seat at her side.

"No." Marama plucked a blade of grass and tore it methodically down the middle. "I want to have a talk with you, Mr. Maddon."

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What possible meaning this simple remark could have conveyed to the man at her side it is impossible to say, but certain it is that he moved nearer to her on the palm log.

"Hasn't this 'Mr. Maddon' and 'Miss Thurston' gone far enough?" he suggested in a tone of light raillery that set Marama's teeth on edge. "My name's Frank and yours is Marama; what's the matter with them as names, apart, altogether, from the fact that we're related?"

"Nothing that I can see," said Marama, "but I don't want to discuss that now; what I want to know is how long you have been defrauding my father?"

"About the rubber? Oh, nearly two years. Both Moala and I thought —"

"No, not about the rubber; I mean the difference of a hundredweight between the men's daily task and the amount entered in the books."

Maddon neither blanched nor staggered backwards. He rose and stood before her, slapping his fat legs with his riding crop. His small mouth twitched into a smile — or was it a sneer?

"Speaking roughly, about two years," he said.

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"I wondered how long it would take you to find out."

Marama found herself at a loss for words. What was there to be said to such a man?

"Are you in the habit of doing this sort of thing?" she at last managed to ask.

"It depends," Maddon answered, with his head at a reflective angle. "In the present instance I consider I am justified. You don't suppose I agreed to marry a half-caste and manage this estate for nothing, do you?"

Marama could feel the blood ebbing from her face.

"Kindly leave my sister out of the question," she said, with a strange calm; "you had your salary."

Maddon shrugged his narrow, curving shoulders.

"Salary!" he repeated with gentle irony. "My dear Miss — er — Marama, you surely don't suppose we white men leave the luxuries of life and embrace barbarism for a salary. Besides, you seem to forget, I'm one of the family; what I make remains in the family — do you see what I mean?"

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"Yes," she said, "I see what you mean."

"I'm glad of that." Maddon resumed the slapping of his legs with an air of relief. "What are you going to do about it?" he enquired after a pause.

There was no answer.

"It would do no good to tell the old man. He would either scratch his leg and implore you not to fluster him, or, more amusing still, fly into a drivelling rage and order me off the place. Then what would happen to Moala?"

"Yes, I've thought of all that," said Marama.

Her calm attitude rather puzzled Maddon, and he was not fond of puzzles.

"You have, eh?" he commented. "Well, what are you going to do?"

Marama slowly raised her head and looked into his eyes with a steady stare of loathing.

"I don't know — yet," she said.

Maddon's manner underwent a sudden change. He rested one foot on the log, and with his arm on his knee, looked down on her almost appealingly.

"Don't let's quarrel, Marama," he said. "You're a maddening woman, and 'pon my soul,

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I don't believe you know it. That's the result of this English education of yours. Forget it! You've gone a long way, but forget it altogether! It will do you no good out here, and it's made no difference to you really; I know what I'm talking about."

His pale face twitched with the sudden, uncontrolled passion of the weak. Marama saw something growing in his eyes, and, for the moment, the antics of this vile little white thing held her spellbound.

". . . do you suppose I haven't watched you?" it was saying. "Do you suppose I haven't seen it growing in you every day — the loneliness and the longing? Don't tackle Templeton; there's something fishy about Templeton. I don't know what, but I'll know before long. . . ." He was sitting beside her now. She could feel his breath on her cheek. ". . . you want to know what to do. I'll tell you. Come with me out of this hole of a place. You weren't made for it. Look things in the face, Marama — what is there for you here? Do you know how white men look on half-castes? But you must — or if you don't, you soon will.

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Come away from it. We'll go to Sydney. I'll get a divorce — the easiest thing in the world — and — and I'll marry you. . . ."

He considered it a compliment! A generous concession! Even at that moment the grotesque humour of it came home to Marama, creating in her a wild desire to laugh; but it was the touch of the thing's hand on her body that electrified her into life and movement. She wondered afterwards how it happened. All that she knew at the time was that something within her impelled her clenched hand blindly upward and outward; that it came into contact with something soft; that she was standing looking down over the log at a white object writhing in the grass, and that a voice she recognised was speaking close beside her.

"He's in a fit," it said calmly; "he has them sometimes. You'd better come away."

But Marama felt powerless to move. The white thing was still writhing horribly. Somehow she felt she could not leave until it had finished writhing.

When it had, Maddon staggered to his feet, a white scum on his lips, his face twisted almost

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out of recognition. For a long time his glazed eyes stared at the man and woman before him, then he turned without a word, and threaded an uncertain way down the plantation, until his round, white figure was no more than a vivid speck against the all-pervading green of the cocoanut groves.

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CHAPTER XI

MARAMA TRIES TO BURN HER BOATS

AND not till then did Marama speak.

"How long were you there?"

"All the time," said Templeton.

"What brought you?"

He held out his rifle with a brace of wild pigeon slung over the stock.

"Mr. Thurston gave me permission to shoot over Munia," he said.

Marama shuddered and sat on the palm trunk.

"I didn't know he was — like that," she said.

"Didn't you? It's the result of too much whisky in the tropics."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

Templeton smiled.

"I couldn't very well."

"No, I see; he's 'one of the family.'" Marama smiled bitterly, then shuddered afresh. "I didn't know such things existed."

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"There are plenty more of them in the Islands," said Templeton.

"It was that last look," she murmured dully, "— and the silence. If he had only said something. . . ."

Templeton deposited the rifle and pigeons in the grass and sat beside her on the log.

"Look here," he said, "I don't want to frighten you, but you're not in England now, and you ought to know for your own good. That silence — I noticed it, too — it's the only sure indication that a man like that means anything. There's nothing — absolutely nothing — that makes them so savage as being made to look ridiculous."

Marama raised a wan face to this man, whose strong, steady voice and reassuring presence were as a drink of clear water to a thirsty soul.

"But did I make him look ridiculous?"

Templeton laughed outright.

"Well, I should rather think you did. So much so that I saw no need to interfere. As far as I could see, you caught him fairly on the solar plexus. It wouldn't have been so bad if I hadn't been there." He smiled reminiscently.

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"We're in the same boat now, Miss Thurston, whatever we were before. He'll hate us both with his own special brand of the commodity. It's the nature of the beast."

Marama rose from the log and tossed the dark hair from her face.

"I'm not afraid of him," she said.

Templeton looked up at her slim, defiant figure with open admiration.

"I know," he answered, "but it's just as well to be on one's guard. You see his game, don't you?"

"His game?"

"Yes. From his pleasant point of view, he didn't bargain for you when he married your sister — I'm putting it bluntly."

"Yes, yes; go on."

"You see, the estate goes to you."

"How did you know that?"

"Mr. Thurston has told me."

"Oh." Marama seated herself native-fashion on the ground and tore up reflective handfuls of grass. "And what else has he told you?"

Templeton shifted the position of his legs and tested the security of his rifle leaning against

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the log. His movements were perfectly natural, but they failed to convince. Marama was looking into his face with a bitter smile on her lips.

"Oh, any number of things," said Templeton, with admirable nonchalance. "I knew him before he was — as ill as he is now."

"Shall I tell you one of them?" she suggested. "Just to show how clever I am."

"By all means."

"He asked you to marry me."

Templeton coloured to the roots of his hair.

"... and you declined with thanks — in spite of the estate being thrown in."

He would have spoken, but she frustrated him with a queer little laugh.

"Don't look so embarrassed. It's not your fault. It's a mania of my father's that I should marry a white man, and you were handy; that's all. We seem fated to talk very plainly to one another, Mr. Templeton."

"It was suggested," Templeton mechanically filled a pipe between his knees, "and naturally I declined. For one thing you hadn't seen me. . . ."

"That's very nicely put."

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"And for another I can never marry."

"I'm sorry to hear that — if you want to; but please don't think I shall trouble you."

He looked up and fastened his steady grey eyes upon her, as though upon an unruly child.

"Don't talk like that," he said; "it's not worthy of you."

"Worthy of me — me!" The tone conveyed bitter incredulity. "What am I worthy of, pray, from your standpoint?"

"Shall I tell you?"

Marama laughed a trifle shrilly.

"There's no need; I had it from that — thing! What he said was true — you know it's true; I mean the way you look on us. I hate you white men! Why do you come here? Why do you leave your luxuries and embrace barbarism? — those were the words. Because you have to — because in nine cases out of ten your own country won't hold you; and when you are here . . ."

Templeton had made a sudden movement, whether of appeal or protest she hardly knew; but his face was working strangely, and the furtive glint had come into his eyes.

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"There," she ended abruptly; "I was getting quite dramatic."

Templeton moistened his lips.

"You were talking wildly, bitterly," he said with an effort.

"Life is bitter," Marama answered, "— for some of us." And to this he made no reply.

They passed down the plantation in silence. At the compound gate Templeton raised his battered solar topee and left her without a word. He was thinking — thinking that what Maddon had said was true. That what Marama had half said was true also, to the last letter of the unuttered words.

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CHAPTER XII

CONCERNS A DEVIL-FISH

AND Marama? Her own life's problem was not enough, then, but others must be thrust upon her. How she longed sometimes for the sheltered, petty existence of an English lady, even at St. Leonards-on-Sea, that prim little watering-place which seemed to her now little more than the memory of a dream!

Here in her own land, despite its gentle beauty and charm, life was in the raw, an untamed beast crouching ever ready to spring.

At others, her natural spirit rose within her. Sternly she told herself not to be a coward; to face unflinchingly whatever might befall. If only — only she were not so terribly alone!

She decided that Maddon was right. No good purpose could be served by telling her father of his treachery. There was Templeton with his promise of help, but what could he do that he had not done? What could any one do?

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She could only hope that the mere fact of her calm and watchful presence at Munia would act as a check on her brother-in-law's future actions.

Then would follow another mood — reckless, desperate, selfish. She would whisper and keep whispering to herself at night in the darkness of her burre: "Brown — brown — brown." Had it not been proved that she was brown, in spite of her accident of colour? Why should she not let her father, Munia, Maddon, Moala go their own ways, and live her own life in the way her brown life should be lived — as the wife of Ratu Madri? Ah, if she only knew for certain that it would mean peace! Templeton had hinted otherwise, but what could it hold more to be dreaded than Maddon?

Ever since that loathsome scene in the cocoa-nut groves, his presence had haunted her like the lingering memory of a nightmare. Her nerves were strung to snapping point. She avoided him like the plague, yet his pale face seemed always with her. For three days he lay in a wicker chair on the verandah, unable to move, but his very helplessness seemed to render

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him the more forbidding. To Marama's overwrought brain he appeared in the guise of some ghastly devil-fish, lying quiescent before reaching out its tentacles to snatch and strangle. How could Moala sit there, she wondered for the hundredth time, fanning him, tending him, hour after hour? Marama was soon to know.

The beach saw her often during these dread days at Munia. There was something clean and open about the blue Pacific, the glistening coral sand, that helped to purge and sooth her mind. Yet it was here that she came upon her sister, a huddled heap of mottled chintz and hair, at the foot of a dilo tree.

She started and shrank as though stung when Marama touched her, then lifted her head from her folded arms. An ugly weal traversed her cheek; huge tears welled and flowed from her soft eyes, but no sound came from her lips. She sat there swaying with pain, weeping silently.

In an instant Marama was down in the sand at her side.

"Moala! Moala!" she cried. "What is it? Tell me — for pity's sake, tell me, dear!"

Moala made no sound, but slowly her head

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sank lower and lower, till it rested in her sister's lap.

"There, there," crooned Marama, caressing her hair. "Tell me when you can. Never mind now — never mind now."

So they remained for a space, two human atoms of anguish and compassion in the great sun-bathed universe; nearer to one another than they had ever been — perhaps nearer than they would ever be again.

Presently Moala gave way to convulsive sobbing, and Marama let her be, knowing that she would be better so. Then, quite suddenly, she lifted her head and dried her streaming eyes on the chintz wrapper.

"He thought — he thought I told you," she blurted. There was resentment in tone and look — resentment against her sister! It startled Marama into instant self-control.

"Told me? Told me what?" she demanded passionately

"About the copra," gulped Moala.

For a moment Marama was too astonished to speak. She sat back on her heels, and looked long and earnestly into her sister's disfigured

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face. She bit her lip to curb the passion of anger that fought for expression; her breast rose and fell. Then she leaned forward and took her sister's brown hands in hers.

"Listen, Moala," she said evenly; "listen and tell me if I'm right. Frank thought you told me that he was stealing the copra, and so — and so he hit you — is that so?" Her voice trembled in spite of herself.

Moala nodded and sniffed.

"I won't have it! I won't have it!" Marama had sprung to her feet. "He can go too far. He is not master here, and he shall know it — now! Come with me, Moala. How dare he — oh, how dare he?"

Moala commenced to sob afresh.

"He's a white man," she said brokenly.

"A white man — good heavens, Moala, have you no spirit — no — no self-respect at all? Do you mean to say he has done this before?"

Moala bowed her head.

"Well —" Marama was bereft of speech. She stood there in the brilliant sunlight, white and choking.

"Moala!" Again she was at her sister's

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side, urging, entreating. "Moala, we're half-castes, and we're alone — quite alone — but we're not dogs. We must stand together and fight. Get up! D'you hear?" She tugged at her sister's mottled wrapper. "Get up! and come with me now. We'll have it out with him — tell him . . ."

Moala looked up with fear in her eyes.

"No," she said. "No; you dunno Frank. It's no good. He's going to kill you — I know when he's going to kill."

"And you'll leave me — alone; you won't lift a hand to protect yourself or me?"

"What can we do?"

"Do?" The simple question was unanswerable, and Marama knew it, but the flame within her was not yet dead. "I'm going to him." The words came between compressed lips. *"I'm going to make him speak!"*

"I wish you'd never come back," wailed Moala. "It was all right before you came back."

"All right — when he thrashed you?"

"He's a white man," said Moala, as though repeating a lesson.

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Marama flung out her hands in a little gesture of despair.

"Moala," she said, "I almost see why he thrashes you. Go back and — and fan him!"

She turned from her and walked swiftly up the beach road, a slim, determined figure, while Moala stared after her with wide, terrified eyes.

Maddon was half sitting, half lying in the wicker chair on the verandah when Marama approached. He had been staring listlessly before him, but now picked up a copy of the Suva *Times* and commenced to read. Marama took a chair a few feet distant and spoke with slow deliberation. She was pale and very calm.

"I have just found," she said, "that you not only steal from my father, but you thrash my sister. Both these have got to stop — I'm going to stop them."

Maddon made neither sound nor movement. There was nothing to indicate that he had heard a word, except that the sickly pallor of his face was now tinged with green.

"You hate me pretty badly," Marama went on; "but you don't hate me any more than I hate you. I believe you'd like to kill me. I know

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that I should like to kill you. Neither of us has very much to lose, but a bully — especially a bullier of women — must be a coward; you're afraid to die. I'm stronger than you, and I'm not afraid of you . . ."

She stopped because there was nothing more to be said. Maddon remained perfectly still and silent, staring at one spot on the Suva *Times*. Then Marama saw the corner of his mouth twitch. Evidently he could not keep it from twitching, for it went on and on — and his left leg moved, too, in little spasmodic jerks. She could bear it no longer. She could feel herself weakening under the strain of this awful silence.

"I thought I would tell you that these things have got to stop," she repeated, and left the verandah with head erect, but with a sickening consciousness that her words had been inept, childish — that she had been defeated, because — he had not spoken!

Alone in her burre she gave way. She admitted, face downward on the pillow, that it was a lie. She had said she was not afraid of him; she was, terribly afraid.

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And Moala?

That evening Marama saw her squatting beside the wicker chair, slowly waving a palm-leaf fan.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE OPEN DOOR

"WHAT is your name?"

"Akanesi."

"Who sent you?"

"The Buli of Niavu."

Marama stood in her burre doorway looking down on the rush basket of prawns and taro, and the woman who had brought them. She was a full-blooded Fijian, and spoke the jargon of town-bred natives, but she was handsome in an alert, wild fashion that appealed to Marama after the stolid, clumber-built native women she had seen.

"I don't understand," she said. "I don't know the Buli of Niavu."

"No?" Akanesi tossed her head and looked up into the other's puzzled face. "Maybe no, but the Buli of Niavu him know the Andi Marama all right."

"Have I met him, then?"

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"No."

"Then how can he possibly know me?"

Akanesi made a clucking noise with her tongue, presumably to show the folly of such a question and her own forbearance in answering it.

"The mataqali him all know the Andi Marama," she said simply. And Marama understood. It was true then—"The mataqali never forgets." Her pulses quickened at the thought. She was not quite alone; the gift of the prawns and taro was a proof that some one back among the hills of Taviuni remembered her, for her mother's sake, and she snatched this scrap of comfort to her heart. It led her to wonder again what manner of life her people lived.

"Come in, Akanesi," she said. "Do you drink tea?"

"Sometime," replied Akanesi, and proved it by disposing of three cups, and showing no particular objection to a fourth.

In the cool, dim interior of the burre they squatted for a while, sipping tea and taking one another's measure as women have a knack of doing the world over. Marama wondered what

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impression she was making on this handsome, virile woman who watched her so intently over the steaming tea cup. And Akanesi wondered — God knows what! She had been sent on this detestable mission, and she must carry it through, in spite of her detestation, in spite of everything. No one could have guessed from her tone or manner that the thing she was now engaged upon meant her own humiliation — perhaps her death. The "great one" had made his will known; it was for her, Akanesi, to obey.

"Where do you come from?" the woman she hated was asking her now, and she answered by waving her beringed hand in the direction of the hills.

The woman she hated moved nearer to her on the mats.

"Tell me, Akanesi," she said. "I have often wondered what lies behind those hills. Some day I shall see for myself, but tell me about them."

"Hills damn funny," said Akanesi judicially. "All big — very big and high, and way down the sea."

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"But the life, the people — for instance, the Buli of Niavu, what is he like?"

Akanesi shut one eye and tilted her chin towards the rafters.

"The Buli of Niavu him damn funny," she announced gravely. "Him big, very big an' no hair, and he spit water sometime when he talk."

Marama laughed at this graphic thumb-nail sketch of the donor of the prawns and taro — laughed for the first time in many a day. How good it was not to be quite alone!

"And the life?" she urged. "What do you all do, day after year up there among your hills?"

"Plenty," said Akanesi. "The yam, the taro, the yaqona, the banana, the tobacco; we plant him an' dig him, an' bring him on the river an' the sea to Suva an' sell him. The Buli of Niavu him got plenty money."

"But do the women do these things?"

"The women do — these — thins," mimicked Akanesi.

Marama's glance fell to her visitor's hands. They were soft and shapely.

"You too, Akanesi?" she suggested.

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"I?" Akanesi stiffened perceptibly. "I, no. I dance the meke. The Buli of Niavu him like plenty meke. I dance him so—"

She commenced to sway gently, gracefully, humming a quaint air and gesturing with her hands, while Marama watched her with shining eyes and throbbing pulses. At that moment Munia, her father, even Maddon, faded from her mind, and she swayed and gestured too, imitating the other's every movement with the faithfulness of a reflection in a looking-glass. Ah, it was good to have something in common with some one. She hardly dared to speak lest the spell should be broken.

And Akanesi posed and chanted — and hated every movement of the woman before her, because she saw that the "great one" was right. He was always right. The meke was born in the Andi Marama.

The time passed all too quickly. Akanesi did faithfully what she had been told to do — answered every question, explained every phase. There was the candle-nut dance. This the Andi Marama recognised on the instant, and with parted lips, bright eyes, and lissom body danced

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it to the abandoned finale. The dance of the hurricane she did not know, but Akanesi knew that she soon would. Reluctantly the teacher confessed to herself that the pupil would excel. She was younger and slimmer than Akanesi; her body more lissom, her movements more subtle and delicate. The canoe dance; the dance of the turtle hunter; even the royal meke — an ensemble of every passion known to human nature — were merely matters of time — hours perhaps, days perhaps — but the meke was born in the Andi Marama and — the "great one" would be pleased. . . .

"Plenty more dance," said Akanesi, when the brief dusk had settled down on sea and beach and hill, and Marama lay exhausted but exultant on the mats.

"If only you could stay with me, Akanesi!" she panted. "What a time we could have together!"

Akanesi looked out through the low doorway towards the hills that were fast fading into the mists of night.

"Plenty more damn funny dance," she said evenly; "I stop."

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She "stopped" three days — three days that constituted hell for herself and happiness for the woman she hated.

Marama learnt many things during this time. Not only how to take the wind, the sea, the swaying of palms, the downpour of rain, human anger, fear, jealousy, love, hatred, and transmute them into pose and gesture, but also how to listen without contempt to Akanesi's quaint descriptions of strange customs and stranger superstitions — of spirits who came on the stillest night with a great rushing of wind to those who could evoke them, and of the miracles they wrought in spite of the tapu placed upon them by the king of Beritania Levu (Great Britain). Of Dakuwaqa (back of a boat) the great shark who lived in the Straits of Taviuni, and sometimes seized cutters and canoes and held them fast against the strongest wind in an embrace of his fins. Of fire-walking, and ghost hills, and countless other mysteries that had baffled the white vavalagi (stranger) and others wiser than he.

At first Marama had listened, as children of a certain age listen to fairy tales — disbelieving

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but hiding their disbelief for the sake of their own entertainment and the feelings of the narrator. But soon the picturesque folk-lore of her native country began to take hold of her, and she found herself absorbing it with eager, earnest interest. For the first time she was glimpsing what lay beyond the open door of her prison cell, and the prospect at once frightened and fascinated her.

At the end of the third day, Akanesi crept to her bed in the corner of the burre, wearied in mind and body. Her task was nearing its end; she thanked her favourite spirits for that, and prayed to them silently for strength to bear the three remaining days.

"A week," the "great one" had said, but it is desperately hard to dance mekes for hours on end and against one's will, and then to keep one's eyes open all through the night.

The woman she hated slept well; better, had Akanesi known it, than for many weeks past. The colour, too, was returning to her cheeks and the brightness to her eyes — such was the magical effect of companionship and security. Three more suns must rise, and three more suns

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must set, and then . . . the "great one" would be pleased . . . it was necessary, oh, very necessary to please the "great one. . . ."

Akanesi opened wide her eyes, guiltily conscious that for a brief moment they had been closed. She raised herself on an elbow and stared into the semi-darkness. At her feet the chest of drawers loomed unnaturally large, and to the left the outline of the Andi Marama's mosquito net and the two king posts of the burre were dimly discernible.

All was still — deathly still — which made it impossible that anything could be moving, yet Akanesi felt that something was moving, as surely as she felt her own heart beat. She held her breath and crouched, for all the world like a panther, then, as the something she felt to be moving, passed on — along the floor — towards the bed of the woman she hated, she sprang blindly into the darkness.

Her outstretched hand came into contact with human flesh that instantly melted from her grasp. Again and again she gripped some portion of a man's writhing anatomy — greased and mother naked — and again and again it slipped

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from her fingers. They struggled on the mats in silence. Something whistled past Akanesi's ear and pricked her left shoulder, but she had a hold at last — the only possible hold — and her thumbs sank deeper and deeper until, with a sudden cry of agony, the man wrenched himself free, stumbled into the doorpost and caromed headlong into the compound with an eye the less.

"Akanesi! Akanesi!"

It was the Andi Marama, with a lighted candle in her hand, her eyes staring wildly. Akanesi drew her wrapper tight about her shoulder and looked up from the mats.

"I all right," she panted.

But the Andi Marama's staring eyes had caught the glint of the copra knife lying at her feet.

"Coolie him no good," said Akanesi. "Him no guts."

Marama picked up the knife and stood staring at it for a space, then a shudder ran through her and she sank to her knees. It had all come back, in an overwhelming tide. The last few days had been a dream. *Maddon had spoken!*

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She crouched there, a tremulous, stricken thing.

"Take me away from here, Akanesi," she breathed in an awed whisper. "Please take me away — to your hills, anywhere. You won't leave me, will you?"

She crept close to the side of the woman who hated her. Akanesi's face was expressionless. Her shoulder smarted — it had all befallen as the "great one" had predicted. He would assuredly be pleased.

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CHAPTER XIV

TEMPLETON CLIMBS UP AND MARAMA CLIMBS DOWN

DURING these days, with their monotonous round of duties that even a beach-comber must perform if he would live, Templeton found Marama Thurston and her life's problem almost constantly before him. Whilst being an anxiety, it was also a new and strangely absorbing interest in life; and he followed it with the thoroughness that he brought to bear on all things claiming his attention, from "googly" bowling to fish shooting.

His appearance at the interview with Maddon in the cocoanut groves had not been accidental. He had gone to Munia with the express purpose of seeing that all was well with Marama, and had seen one of his worst fears realised. There were others, and he had gone more frequently of late, though it was a delicate matter to decide how far he might carry his protective vigilance without presumption. Their compact, as he

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well remembered, was that she would let him know when she needed him. She had not let him know; consequently, he argued, she had not needed him. So much for the value of man's logic when applied to woman.

To Templeton, one of the most disturbing elements in the affair was that *he* needed Marama Thurston. He had never found himself pining for anyone's society before, and it annoyed him because — there was no doubt about it. He wanted to see her, talk with her, and as far as possible he had done so, but on the one occasion during the past week when they had met, he noticed a change in her — a reticence in marked contrast to her usual almost reckless frankness, and an air of forced cheerfulness that had a blighting effect on their easily-formed friendship.

He had shown her how to poison fish in the rock pools with tuva vine; how to unearth land crabs without fear of their powerful claws, and they had waded far over the reefs ankle-deep in the lukewarm water. But when he left her, Templeton felt that the growth of their friendship had received a sudden check. It was as

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though the door of a treasure house, hitherto held alluringly ajar, had been quietly but firmly shut in his face.

How soon he was to force the lock and stand within the threshold, he had no suspicion, as he sprawled in a hammock on the verandah of "Cadogan Mansions." He was only aware that this girl, with her mild brown eyes, and musical, cultured voice, had resuscitated and strengthened his dreaded periods of discontent. She was of that other world he longed for so desperately. She recalled it for him with every turn of her shapely head, every tone and gesture. She had no business to be here on Taviuni at all, much less on the verge of "going native." This last thought constituted an impending catastrophe, and one he was determined to avert. Why? Because it was clearly his duty — the duty of any one who knew. Because she had a soul worth fighting for. Because . . . This last a woman's reason, but sometimes a man's also.

On one occasion he had met Maddon on the beach road, and that gentleman had never been more unctuous. They discussed the copra crop, the possibilities of the hurricane season — any-

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thing and everything but the one subject that was naturally uppermost in both their minds. But the man's bearing had only served to increase Templeton's vigilance.

On another, he had glanced over the Munia compound wall, and had caught a glimpse of Marama and a native woman squatting in the grass outside her burre, swaying and gesturing in unison to the accompaniment of their own singing. So — she was learning the meke. Templeton thought little of this at the time, but now, for some reason, the little scene recurred to his mind with a peculiar vividness. He wondered . . .

Far out to sea bright pinpricks of yellow light marked the night fishing-boats, rising and falling on a gentle swell; and now and then the melancholy hoot of a conch floated over the water, heralding the return of a canoe to its village up the coast. It was a night of perfect calm and fairy-like beauty, but to Templeton only "night" —another of the three hundred and sixty-five that would follow each day to the end of the year, and the year after that. . . .

He was still dreaming when the harsh rasping

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of a boat's keel on sand cut into the silence, and a canoe's dark prow shot from the still darker night into the semicircular glow cast on the sand by the verandah lantern.

Templeton leant out over the balustrade, and looked down into a woman's face. Lime-bleached hair was tumbled about it in picturesque profusion and studded with red hibiscus blossoms. The eyes, large and brown, were fired with some suppressed excitement, and the woman's bosom rose and fell tumultuously beneath wreaths of brilliantly-tinted flowers.

It was Akanesi, though a different Akanesi to the one who had brought Marama prawns and taro from the buli of Niavu. She had done as the "great one" directed, and was now free to follow the dictates of her own semi-savage instinct.

"You Missi Templeto?" she demanded.

"Yes."

"An' Mrs. Templeto?"

Templeton frowned, then smiled.

"I have no Mrs. Templeto," he answered.

The woman shook her head in stolid disbelief.

"Marama Templeto," she explained.

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For a moment Templeton was on the verge of indignant protest, but what was the use? He understood the native mind well enough to know that he might argue till the dawn without convincing the woman below him. He also knew that island beaches have invisible eyes and ears, and wagging tongues that rival the telegraph for the transmission and distortion of news. He and Marama Thurston had been seen together three — four times; that was quite sufficient cause for gossip.

"She's out just at present," he said, with the easy resignation of one humouring a child.

The woman threw back her tousled head and laughed.

"Out," she mimicked derisively, "outa just-apresen! Maybe you know where?"

"On the contrary," said Templeton, "I haven't the least idea."

"An' you doncare."

"I shouldn't go so far as to say that," he answered with studied imperturbability.

The woman angrily stamped a naked foot on the sand.

"Maybe if I tell you —" she began fiercely,

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and checked herself. "Come," she ended abruptly, pleadingly, "I take you to him; him dam funny, I promise."

Templeton frowned perplexedly.

"What is your reason for — for this?" he asked.

"I no like him Marama," she answered sullenly. "I no good, him all right. You come an' see."

And he went.

In silence they launched the canoe on a sea of inky shadows, and with long, swinging strokes the woman paddled it up the coast a mile — two miles, until they came to a mangrove-fringed bay, where they waited for a giant roller and sped in on its crest.

On and up through a maze of tangled undergrowth they threaded their way; round huge boulders of volcanic rock, and along faint paths that seemed to spring into being beneath Templeton's feet, and vanish as mysteriously as they had come. He could only tell that he was going upward into the hills of Taviuni, and blindly followed the flitting figure before him, until the faint drone of voices came to his ears, and he

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sank panting into the waist-high grass of an open glade.

The moon had risen now, throwing the grass-thatched roof of a native house into pale relief against an inky background of wild banana plants and screw-pines.

The woman began to creep towards it, beckoning him to follow, and presently they crouched in the shade of its forestward wall.

"You stop," she whispered in his ear. "Him dam funny I promise."

Quickly she tore away the leaves and grass and prised apart the reed framework, until a hole was made; then she pushed him towards it and vanished among the trees.

Peering into the house, Templeton experienced an unaccountable wave of relief. The inevitable kava-drinking ceremony was in progress, that was all. On a raised dais at the end of the room Ratu Madri squatted native-fashion, hugging a horny foot to his groin and watching the preparations with the same expression of bored indifference that he wore when he honored the meetings of the legislative assembly in Suva with his presence.

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Three girls, with the plaited tombes[1] of maidenhood, sat round the tanoa, their cheeks bulging with half-chewed root, whilst the guests ranged round the walls of the room talked in undertones, or rehearsed some chant for the meke that was to follow. Amid loud tamas Ratu Madri drained the cocoanut shell of kava presented by a crouching native, and sent the cup spinning across the mats toward the tanoa.

When all had drunk, a tall, grey-bearded man rose to his feet and was greeted with murmurs of applause. He stood erect and motionless until silence had been restored, then commenced to chant in a deep monotone, his sleek body swaying to the rhythm of his words:

"Here are we met,
Back in the hills,
The hills of our fathers,
To taste of the old life,
The true life.

"Of the whites we are weary,
Their ways are not our ways
Though forced upon us;
And now we return
To the hills of our fathers,
To taste of the old life,
The true life.

[1] Plaits of hair.

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"And one of our number,
Whose veins run with Royal blood,
Whose feet are as feathers
Wafted on breezes,
To-night, here amongst us
Shall dance the Royal meke
In the hills of our fathers,
And taste of the old life,
The true life."

The applause was deafening, so that no one heard Templeton tear the hole in the wall to greater width, or saw his face pressed close into the opening.

The chorus then commenced a measured chant, and a young girl stepped from the shadows of a far corner into the ring of yellow light traced on the matting by a lantern in the roof. Her skin, glinting between the seed necklaces and wreaths of flowers that draped her from head to waist, was fair, and the lustrous hair, tumbling loose about her shoulders, held warmer tints of brown and gold.

She stood straight and lissom as a larch, her face an expressionless mask, her lithe young body as motionless as a statue. Then slowly she seemed to revive as from a trance. The lips smiled, the body swayed gently. It seemed to

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The same dainty little lady Templeton had seen on the tennis court at Vuna. *Page* 161.

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be answering far-off memories conjured up by the music, obeying instincts of long ago.

The half-naked body posed and writhed with the sensuous, diabolical grace of a bygone savagery; while above it smiled the delicately-moulded features of a refined and cultured Englishwoman . . . the same dainty little lady Templeton had met on the tennis court at Vuna.

The remembrance created a contrast too extreme, too gruesome. His grip tightened on the framework of the wall, and a bamboo slipped from its place with a sharp snap and a rustling of leaves, and on the instant he knew that he had been seen.

The dancer stood transfixed, her eyes fastened on the white face framed in the wall, though the music droned monotonously on. Then, without a sound, she turned swiftly and fled through the low door behind her out into the forest.

. . . . . .

All that night, and for a greater part of the next day, Templeton searched for her among the hills of Taviuni; then, unawares, he stumbled upon her in a rocky gully, exhausted but defiant. He had never seen her so beautiful.

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"Don't come near me," she panted. "Do you hear? Stay where you are!"

"Come home," said Templeton quietly.

"Why do you follow me?" she cried fiercely. "What do you want with me?"

"I want you to come home," he repeated with gentle insistence.

"You want me to come home! Why? What have I to do with you? See!" she threw her arms wide, displaying the draperies of tinselled seeds and faded flowers in all their crudity. "What have I to do with you and your kind? I — the real I — am what you saw — back there — last night! Oh, can't you see and let me be?"

"Yes, I see," Templeton answered; "that is why I have come to take you home. That was not the real 'you.' You may try to kill it, but it won't be killed, and afterwards — when it is too late — you will come to and find yourself in hell. I know!"

"I'm not afraid of hell!" she flashed. "It can be no worse than Munia. Ah, you know so much; perhaps you can tell me what he would have done next. He tried to have me murdered

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in my bed. I said I was not afraid of him — I am, terribly afraid. But why should I tell you? It will do no good, and I shall be safe here among my own people."

Templeton bit his lip and stared at the ground. When he looked up, his face was set, his grey eyes alight with an unaccustomed fire.

"It makes this difference," he said, with harsh deliberation, "that if you will come back with me now, I swear he shall do you no harm. Is that enough? Will you trust me? You don't know what this other life would mean to you — the real 'you.'"

His eyes were fastened upon her now, and for the first time Marama seemed aware of it — aware of herself. The blood surged to her face. Her hands went out, feeling for the seed necklaces and drawing them closer about her slender body. Then, quite suddenly, she sank down into the grass and hid her face in her hands.

"I'm ashamed — ashamed," she sobbed.

Templeton knelt down at her side, and flung his jacket about her shoulders. He knew that he had won.

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CHAPTER XV

THE RATU RECEIVES A VISITOR AND BECOMES COMMERCIAL

RATU MADRI was reading a novel on the verandah when his launch chugged alongside the landing steps, and Maddon came up the shell pathway leading to the house.

The chief welcomed him with his charming, mechanical smile, and indicated a wicker chair and the spirit Tantalus, with a movement of the hand.

"Help yourself," he said. "Warm, isn't it?"

Maddon steadied his arm on the edge of the table as he leant over to press the siphon handle, but the support failed to hide the trembling of his hands, and some of the soda-water spilled on the cloth.

He looked ghastly and knew it, which is always disconcerting to an habitual invalid. Moreover, he never quite knew how to take

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Ratu Madri. More than once he had attempted an attitude of easy camaraderie towards him, but had met with a repulse so delicate yet so effective, that Maddon was actually impressed. The repulse also filled him with a suspicion — which as a matter of fact was well founded — that Ratu Madri was an unerring judge of human nature, and read him like an unwholesome book.

"Hot!" he ejaculated, setting the empty glass on the table, and mopping his perspiring, white forehead. "It's hell! I'm all to pieces."

Ratu Madri looked out over the sea.

"You've been here too long without a change," he said at last. "Why don't you try a week or two in the Blue Mountains — only a few hours out of Sydney, but the air is a miracle and the views superb. I heard an American say they have nothing finer in the Grand Canyon. Then there are the Jenolan Caves. I visited them with a professor from the university, and he explained that the general idea about stalagmites is quite incorrect; the . . ."

Maddon moved impatiently in his chair.

"Did you send for me to listen to a lecture on

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the Blue Mountains?" he asked suddenly. "Because, if so, I think I shall be getting back."

"It doesn't interest you?" Ratu Madri's tone was an apology. "I'm sorry. I should have thought a man in your position would have welcomed any suggestion for the betterment of his health. Locomotor ataxia is practically incurable, I believe. Though a change would certainly prolong your life, and the Blue Mountains . . ."

"It's thoughtful of you," sneered Maddon, "but may I ask why you're so anxious to get rid of me?"

"I? Not at all. You quite misunderstand me, Mr. Maddon. It was merely a suggestion and entirely for your own benefit. I thought, perhaps, you were not aware how ill you really are. Some people are singularly blind in that direction. There was the case of young Charlton, for instance . . ."

Maddon grasped the arm of his chair.

"Do you suppose I would stay in this hole another day if I could get out of it," he snapped.

"Not for one minute," replied the other,

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blandly, "but I wanted to make quite sure before going any further."

"Well, you can go — as far as you like."

"Thank you." Ratu Madri crossed his legs and tapped the cover of the novel lying on the table at his side. "I was sitting here the other evening watching the sunset," he continued in his leisurely drawl. "Some would have thought it a very ordinary sunset — for Fiji, but to me it appeared forbidding. It was tinged with a peculiar green that I have noticed before hurricanes, and in a number of ways it reminded me of you — no, please don't interrupt. I want you to listen very carefully and tell me if I am wrong when I have finished. Then it suddenly occurred to me that whatever I might think of you, personally, our ends — or rather the means necessary to gain our separate ends — are identical. At first this amused me. Then it interested me, and, finally, I sent for you, because I saw that we could be of very considerable use to one another. I mean, of course, in the removal of Miss Thurston from Munia."

Maddon showed no surprise.

"What makes you think I want her moved

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from Munia?" he demanded with a hint of truculence.

Ratu Madri sighed.

"Can't we dispense with the details?" he suggested wearily. "They are sordid, to say the least, and after the little incident of the other day I should have thought —"

"They told you, did they?" The words were spat rather than spoken.

Ratu Madri shook his head wearily.

"No," he said, "neither of them told me." And Maddon knew enough of island beaches to believe him.

"You seem to take a tender interest in this half-caste," he remarked, with a poor imitation of the other's manner.

Ratu Madri turned towards him with a pleasant smile.

"Naturally," he said, in a level, colourless voice, "when she happens to be my intended wife."

Maddon looked up with mouth agape, then gave a short cackle of laughter.

Ratu Madri continued to tap the cover of the novel, his touch becoming slightly heavier.

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"You find it amusing," he commented. "Perhaps it is. A lover's sense of humour is notoriously deficient as far as his own affair is concerned, so I know you will excuse my not joining in your mirth." He turned in his chair with a suddenness that surprised the other into silence. "But the loss of one sense often strengthens another, Mr. Maddon, and in this case it is the sense of possession. If you so much as touch, or cause to have touched a hair of Miss Thurston's head, I'll have you strangled like a woman." [1]

There was a pause, while Maddon strove with a contraction of the throat that denied speech. He struggled to rise, but for some reason his legs refused their office.

"W — what the devil d'you mean?" he jerked out. "This is a British Crown colony and the year nineteen hundred and thirteen."

"In the year two thousand and thirteen a Ratu will probably still be a Ratu in Fiji," observed the chief dryly.

"You're — you're talking out of your hat;

[1] It was customary in old Fiji to strangle women on widowhood.

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you don't seem to savvy that you're a back number — a tin-pot figurehead. You couldn't do it!"

"You think so?"

"Besides, who says I ever intended to touch a hair of her head?"

"I do."

Maddon leant back in his chair, his face twitching with emotion. There was obviously only one retort to this assertion, but he failed to make it. Instead, he broke into a tremulous chuckle.

"We white men usually make sure of a thing before we talk about 'possessions,'" he said. "I suppose she's accepted you."

"No, not yet."

Ratu Madri heaved himself out of his chair, set light to a cigar, and leant over the verandah railing.

"I thought as much; and what sort of a chance do you think you stand against Templeton?"

"I'm not quite sure, but that makes no particular difference."

"Oh, doesn't it? Then I can tell you that it does. You're a rank outsider, Madri."

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The chief turned with raised eyebrows.

"You seem singularly slow of understanding, Mr. Maddon," he said, with a slight emphasis on the prefix. "Perhaps if I put it a little more broadly — Mr. Templeton must be removed — removed altogether. Do you see now what I meant when I said we could be of assistance to one another?"

Apparently Maddon did, for he stared at the floor in silence while the other went on.

"It's regrettable, most regrettable. He has a really remarkable break. In fact it is more than a break; the ball swerves from leg and then breaks off; I found tremendous difficulty in mastering it. . . ."

"Look here," Maddon glanced up suddenly. "I quite see that I should be helping you, but what good does it do me?"

"The amount of good my marriage with Miss Thurston will do you is a matter of arrangement," said Ratu Madri. "In any case it would mean her removal from the scene of your — shall we call them 'operations'— leaving you a free hand once more; but I may say that I hardly expected this alone would satisfy you. In your

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present condition, and taking young Charlton as an instance, you have no time to lose, even in the accumulation of money; you must get away at once, and I suggest a lump sum down, and the Blue Mountains."

Maddon frowned at the floor.

"I don't like it," he muttered, at last.

"Of course not. Neither do I. I am almost certain the young man means well, but, like many of his calibre, he is a nuisance. The matter was almost completed when he saw fit to interfere. There is nothing I resent so much as interference."

"I wasn't thinking of him," growled Maddon. "I was thinking of myself."

"Ah, to be sure, and what could be more natural?"

"Of course there are the coolies to blame it on to."

"As you say, there are the coolies. At the last meeting of the Assembly the governor remarked on the increase of crime among these people — crime with no apparent cause. I asked what else could be expected from the dregs of Central India, and he seemed inclined to

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agree with me. There is talk of stopping their introduction on that account. But naturally the planters favour cheap labour and . . ."

He stopped abruptly as the other looked up.

"What's it worth?" Maddon demanded.

Ratu Madri reseated himself, crossed his legs, and gazed pensively at his left calf.

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CHAPTER XVI

DEMONSTRATES THE BENEFIT THAT MAY ACCRUE FROM A COUPLE OF INCHES

BETWEEN "Cadogan Mansions" and the beach road lay an open space, perhaps thirty feet square, roughly fenced with bamboo. The casual observer would probably have taken it for a garden, but on closer inspection would have met with something of an enigma, for the enclosure contained nothing more than a level stretch of sand covered with a maze of narrow pathways marked by pebbles of different colours and sizes. Here and there they converged upon a tiny square or circle, and here and there, with no apparent rhyme or reason, were arranged blocks of volcanic rock and broken fragments of coral.

It had taken Templeton eighteen months to reach the present stage of perfection in this mystifying work of art, and it was doubtful if he would ever finish it; but he was in no way dis-

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couraged. In fact, as an effort of memory, he looked upon it with a certain amount of pride. It is something to reproduce the city of London on a South Sea beach, and this is what he had done.

The West End was complete as far east as Charing Cross and the arteries of the Strand, Oxford Street, and Marylebone Road had been simple enough; but what of the network of small streets and by-lanes that lay behind them? His brain had reeled at the thought; and from there onward he had been obliged to confine himself to the main thoroughfares, only leaving them to mark some well-beloved restaurant, or club, with a fragment of coral.

It was by such simple, almost childish means that he had helped to eke out his endless days, and through them that the sickening periods of revolt,— when he allowed his mind to return to the world from which his body was exiled — became rarer and less acute.

He was in "London" now, because he had suddenly remembered the whereabouts of Villiers Street. And he was kneeling in the sand, intent on its inclusion, when a head appeared above the

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bamboo fence, and a voice he instantly recognised wished him "good day." It was the woman who had led him into the hills on that night he would never forget.

"Good day," he returned. "Come inside."

The woman obeyed, and squatted in the sand in silence. Templeton knew that she had come to him of set purpose. He knew also that in Fiji questions are the surest bar to information, so he whistled an air from the Mikado, and went on with his work.

"Him all right," she said suddenly, pointing a brown finger at the Savoy Hotel.

"Isn't it?" he answered cheerfully. "We can do you a good dinner there — or would you prefer the Trocadero?"

"Trocadero?" she mimicked enquiringly.

"Trocadero it is; then what do you say to the Alhambra? We take a cab here, and we go down here and along there; then we go in here, past two very big turagas in very fine clothes, up some steps on to a very big — verandah, and look down at a very big meke. . . ."

"Eo. Then?"

The woman was leaning eagerly forward.

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"Ah, then," said Templeton, "we ought to go home."

"All very big," his audience persisted.

"Yes, London all very big."

"Londoni all right," observed the woman, nodding her head judicially.

"As you remark," said Templeton, "Londoni is all right, if you can get there."

Then a thought seemed to strike him, for he suddenly drew the carte-de-visite photograph from his pocket.

"A friend of mine," he said lightly. "What do you think of him?"

She glanced at the picture, then up at Templeton.

"It make you more nice without the hair," she said, and handed it back.

Templeton, disappointed, checked an impatient movement.

"Listen," he said earnestly, holding up the picture. "Tell me; if I met you in — in, say Levuka, would you know me for him?"

"Eo," replied the woman, nodding her head.

"All would know."

"Eo," she repeated cheerfully.

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Templeton returned the picture to his pocket and straightened himself wearily.

"You're a good girl," he said absently; "what's your name?"

"Akanesi."

"Well, Akanesi, there's some tobacco for you. Sit tight and smoke while I finish St. Paul's Churchyard."

There was a long silence, during which the woman extracted a piece of dried banana leaf from some hidden depository in her sulu and rolled a cigarette.

"Missi Maddon him go Bau in Ratu Madri launch," she observed presently.

Templeton looked up from his task and smiled pityingly.

"Is that all, Akanesi? I knew that very well already."

Akanesi looked disappointed.

"Ratu Madri no like you," she suggested tentatively.

"Alas!" sighed Templeton, bowing his head as before a crushing blow. "That also I know, and only too well."

Akanesi studied him with a puzzled scrutiny,

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and allowed a thin ribbon of smoke to creep upward over her face.

"There is hurricane in the air," Templeton added with cheerful irrelevance. "Did you notice the sunset last night, Akanesi?"

This was too much; the woman dug her toes viciously into the sand.

"Ratu Madri him marry Marama Templeto," she observed, with the air of one launching a thunderbolt.

"Really?" said Templeton. "That will be bad business for you, won't it, Akanesi?"

"An' you — she like you all right."

"Does she? I'm glad to hear that."

Templeton put the finishing touches to St. Paul's Churchyard and passed on to Cheapside. Akanesi regarded him in silence, then got to her feet and spat with deliberation. It was the sign that the interview, as far as she was concerned, was closed.

"Samoce," said Templeton, as she moved towards the gate, but the woman did not answer. White men were most certainly mad, and the "mad turaga" was well named.

When she had gone, Templeton went into the

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house and flung himself into a chair. He had won. Marama Thurston had returned to Munia. He naturally atttributed her surrender, sudden as it was complete, partly to his pleadings, and partly to the promptings of her better nature, never for a moment divining the fundamental cause — that she was a woman, and he happened to have been the one being who could have induced her to turn back from the hills of Taviuni.

However, now that the thing was accomplished, he looked upon it as a triumph, and one that brought with it still graver responsibilities. It needed no warning from the jealous Akanesi to assure him of this. Only some hour or two before, and through his telescope, Templeton had seen Maddon step into Ratu Madri's launch. Knowing both men as he did, the combination puzzled and troubled him. What possible object could the chief have in sending post haste for a man he had always and openly despised?

For two more days he was left in doubt. Then, one evening, whilst he was oiling his rifle by lamplight on the verandah, the answer came, short and sharp, out of the darkness — a rifle

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shot, mingled with the crash of glass. The lamp fell shattered to the floor, and a tongue of flame quivered over the boarding and dripped to the sand.

Instinctively he sprang backwards and crouched against the house; then, realising that his white ducks offered an easy mark against the weather-boarding, seized his rifle and leapt blindly over the balustrade, landing on all fours in the sand and crawling to shelter behind one of the verandah supports.

Twelve yards distant Maddon lay in the bushes that bordered a curve of the beach road, spitting inaudible curses along the barrel of his rifle! A moment before he had been drunk — drunk enough to have a steady hand and full command of his limbs. Now he was sober and trembled from head to foot. He cursed the whisky which had inspired him with the courage for such an open attack, the night for its treachery of a shifting cloud rack that unveiled a watery moon. All had depended on that first shot. Was it possible that he had missed?

The clearly defined figure on the verandah was gone. Had it fallen on the floor carrying

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the lamp with it? Had it escaped and darted into the house — or was it creeping towards him now, under cover of the bushes? The uncertainty was the hell of it, and, as the moments dragged by without sign or sound, his terror grew.

At sight of something dimly white, moving low down on the opposite side of the beach road, the rifle butt fluttered to his shoulder, but his trembling fingers fumbled about the trigger-guard, and the object — whether a patch of moonlight or a man — had vanished.

He must lie quite still; that was all, and even as the desire took form in his mind, he felt his legs twitching in the undergrowth behind him.

The rustle they made, faint, yet loud enough to be heard at twenty paces in the deathly quiet of a tropical night, filled him with a new and awful dread. He had been seen! He must have been seen! Perhaps at that moment the other was upon him, taking deliberate aim. In a sudden access of terror he scrambled to his feet and broke from cover, running in half-demented zigzags down the cocoanut grove that lay before him, until, from sheer exhaustion, he

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stumbled behind a palm and crouched there gasping.

On all sides the palm trunks stretched away in uniform rows like the pillars of some vast, dimly-lit temple. There was still no sound, no sign of a living thing. The relief was too much for Maddon, and the limp semi-apathy of reaction had already set in when he caught sight of that which brought him to his feet, flattened against the tree trunk as though part of it: the same white object, low down, gliding from tree to tree like a will-o'-the-wisp, yet always decreasing the small but precious space between them.

It was Templeton! There could be no possible doubt of it. But here at least was something tangible, not an unseen death crouching in the bushes. Maddon steadied the barrel of his rifle against the palm trunk, then lowered it to the grass. Should he fire and betray his whereabouts, or should he wait until . . . There was no time. Whether by sheer chance, or knowledge that a brief glimpse had given, the enemy was creeping steadily nearer. The trees were thirty feet apart, Maddon knew, but

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the other seemed to cover the distance in a flash, and it was too late to move himself. His finger tightened on the trigger. . . .

The shot had hardly died away down the plantation when a voice came with startling distinctness from the sheltering trunk of a neighbouring palm.

"Ah, there you are! I thought I was heading about right. Where do you want to be hit, Maddon?"

"It will be murder!" gasped the wretched man.

"Not a bit of it," was the cheerful response. "Never fancied your line of business myself. I'm only going to wing you. Thought you might like to have some say as to the locality!"

"Before God! I . . ."

"What do you say to the right leg, just above the knee?"

"I swear it was not my fault. Madri . . ."

"Of course there are arteries, but I think I can fix that up. Or will you take a running chance? Used to be rather good at pot shots, but if you can get to the next tree . . ."

The rest was drowned in sudden, incoherent

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blasphemy and a spattering succession of shots fired at random.

"That'll never do," came the implacable voice. "Save your ammunition, man. I'm thinking of moving to nearer cover and you might get a sporting chance. . . ."

Why in God's name didn't he fire? Anything to break the hellish suspense. Maddon's fingers clawed at the bark of the tree in his frenzied efforts to stand still.

"I give in!" he shrieked. "Do what you like."

"What, come out and give you another chance?" railed the voice. "No, thanks! Come out yourself."

Templeton never knew whether the movement was voluntary or involuntary, but the words were hardly uttered when a round, white figure reeled into the open, seemed to dance a few weirdly eccentric steps and fell in a crumpled heap.

All he was quite sure of at the moment was that unless he found some means to stop the bleeding from the bullet wound in his left arm, he would most certainly faint.

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CHAPTER XVII

A BLACK NIGHT AND A SULLEN DAWN

AT twelve o'clock that night, Marama came to the door of her burre in search of a breeze, though she knew there was none to be found. Night hung over the earth like a hot, moist blanket. There was something ominous in the utter stillness of sea, sky and air. But presently a faint breeze, warm and soft as velvet, drifted up from the ocean, and set the broad leaves of the banana plants in the compound aquiver in the moonlight. The silver sheet of the sea was broken into tiny ripples, and a broad, black bank of cloud crept up from the horizon.

Marama watched its coming with a sigh of relief, and leant further out to catch the blessed movement of air.

The breeze stiffened, and presently the cocoanut palms began to sway and whisper, and the boom of the surf, awakened from a long sleep,

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sounded like the echo of distant battle far out on the barrier reef.

Still the cloud crept on towards the moon. Soon the crisp patter of rain sounded on the bone-dry earth, deadening, but not drowning, the plaintive cries of frigate birds as they flew inland flock after flock.

A light sprung into being in the window of Mr. Thurston's burre and, throwing a wrapper about her, Marama hurried across the compound. Moala had left Munia that evening, without saying where she was going, or when she would be back, and no doubt her father needed her.

She found him at the door, squatting on his haunches, and pointing excitedly at the sky. He spoke, but Marama only caught the one word "rubber" before the hurricane burst upon them.

The corrugated iron roof of the bungalow was carried away in the first gust, and Marama listened to it rattling into the darkness, like ineffectual stage thunder. She seized her father by the arm, and together they clung desperately to the doorpost, seeing nothing, but hearing strange sounds that came intermittently through the clamour of wind and rain: the crack of splitting

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timber; the crash of glass, as gravel hurtled through the bungalow windows; the heavy patter of nuts, that were falling from the palms like hail.

Something flew out of the night and struck Marama on the forehead. She put up her hand and brought it away wet, yet still she clung to the doorpost of the swaying burre, and strained her eyes out into the darkness. Surely the worst had passed — but no. The wind! It no longer shrieked and wailed, but had swelled to one stupendous roar — thrashing the palms like reeds; stripping them of every leaf; tearing the grass from the very earth, and blowing it in rolls against the burre wall.

All this Marama saw by a spectral gleam of the moon; then the sky closed up again, black as ink. Her hand went out in the darkness and touched the matting of the floor — matting and empty air! Her father had gone. How — when —?

Out in the darkness he was crawling on all fours; inch by inch, foot by foot. Through pools of water, over stones and tangled brushwood, towards his beloved rubber. Would it stand

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the strain? At least he could feel. The thought gave him strength. Two hundred acres of three-year-old rubber! A palm crashed down out of the darkness ahead of him, another fell behind. He crouched in the mud and sobbed like a child. The trees were going — trees he had known for forty years. He raised his two hands in impotent blasphemy, for the shouted words were caught from his lips and drowned in the chaos about him. Still, there was the rubber; planted on a westerly slope and sheltered by mummy apple-trees — small crops had been known to stand where palms were levelled to the ground. He still groped on. Two hundred acres — a splendid property. . . . Another tree crashed to earth in front of him; another some distance behind, and the snapping of a third sounded above the tumult like a pistol shot — directly overhead.

It fell. And the wind tore on, shrieking its requiem over a levelled palm trunk and an old, mud-besmeared dressing-gown.

. . . . . .

With the grey of dawn Marama found what she had sought during the nightmare of the last

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four hours, and now sat beside it in a merciful half-stupor.

Her father was dead — it mattered little. Munia had been wiped from the earth like a drawing from a slate — it mattered less. And by some miracle she had escaped — which mattered least of all. She only wanted rest. Some corner where she could find shelter from the cold and wet; where she could sleep and forget the horrors of that night.

It was so that a party of Fijians, driven from their wrecked village down the coast, found her a few hours later.

"They are dead," said one.

"Sengai," said another, "the woman sleeps."

But an old man detached himself from the rest and touched Marama on the shoulder.

"It is the Andi Marama," he said. "She goes with us to the hills. See to the other."

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CHAPTER XVIII

FATE POINTS OUT THE PATH

BY the miracle of hurricanes, which often accounts for the devastation of one strip of country and the escape of another half a mile distant, Bau was untouched. But it was some days before news came from Taviuni, and Ratu Madri paced his verandah with an impatience that even he was unable to hide.

"Well?" he demanded, when at last a messenger arrived in a sailing canoe and squatted at his feet, literally wriggling with suppressed information.

"Vuna and Munia are no more," said the man. "Not a tree stands — not a shrub. Missi Thurston is dead; Missi Maddon is dead —"

"Dead!"

"Eo, Ratu; a tree killed the old man; the other we found among the cocoanuts behind the

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house of the mad turaga. There was no mark upon him, but his face was twisted."

"What of the mad turaga?"

"He walks the beaches with his left arm swathed in cloth, seeking the Andi Marama. His house is wrecked . . ."

"Yes, yes; go on, fool; what has befallen the Andi Marama?"

"She is safe, Ratu. We took her that night to the hills; it was the Buli of Niavu who sent me to tell you."

For the first time Ratu Madri's face relaxed into a smile.

"Tell the Buli he has acted wisely," he said. "Tell him that I will visit Niavu in the course of a few days, and that until then I entrust the Andi Marama to his care. You can go."

And so for two weeks Marama Thurston lived among the hills of Taviuni, asking no more than the kindness that was shown her. Fate, it seemed, had chosen the path that she must follow, and, as the sun-bathed days slipped by, she found herself settling down into a lethargic acceptance of things as they have to be.

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"What has befallen the Andi Marama?" *Page* 192

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Templeton? She thrust him almost impatiently from her mind. Who was he? What was he but a shadow, for which in a weak moment she had forsaken the substance? She regretted now that she had ever returned to Munia. Where was this hell he had told her of? The Buli of the village had given her a burre; the women brought her food, and although she could not speak their tongue, she saw that they treated her with respect and consideration. As Ratu Madri had said, "The matagali never forgets." For her mother's sake these kindly brown people would take care of her, and what else mattered? There was nothing to fight for now.

It was as though, in an instant, she had been whirled from the rapids of life into some still, deep backwater, where effort, even time, took pause, and where the world seemed very far away.

In the early morning, while the dew was still on the grass, and a wind, as yet unburdened with the heat of the sun, drifted down from the surrounding hills, she would bathe with the other women in a pebbly stream behind the village,

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and they would stand about her in the water clucking admiringly at her fair skin, stroking it tenderly and running their brown fingers through her hair, that the sun might catch its golden glint. One, in an ecstasy of delight, had taken her arm and playfully buried her teeth in the soft flesh. It was a compliment, and Marama understood.

Then, as the day wore on, she would accompany them in search of fat prawns among the shallows of the river; help them to carry bamboos full of water from the river to the village, or beat out tappa cloth from the bark of the masi tree.

But it was in vain that she tried to show these women that she was one of them, ready and willing to do her share of the work. They steadfastly refused to entertain any such idea, and laughed good-humouredly at her attempted industry.

She soon found that in one way, and only one, could she please them, and so make some return for their kindness. In the evenings she would hold a kind of informal reception in her burre, and dance a meke while they squatted about the

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floor, chanting an accompaniment and swaying and clapping their hands to the rhythm of it. Of this they never seemed to tire, and strangely enough the fascination of the dance, which came to her as easily and naturally as breathing, and the open adulation of her audience, grew on Marama day by day, until she came to look upon it as her vocation, and accepted the homage of her audience as a tribute to her art.

Emerald green hills, red earth paths, blue sky and sunlight. Life had narrowed down to this, and she told herself that she sighed for no broader vision.

But at night it was sometimes different. As she lay on the mats staring through the open doorway at the stars, thoughts would force themselves upon her. How had "he" fared in the hurricane? Perhaps he was looking for her now. Perhaps he thought her dead. It was just as well, perhaps. He had meant to be kind. He had been very kind! Why? Who was he? "There are the other things, and they call and keep calling . . ." There he was wrong: they might call him but not her. Only one voice calls a woman. Why . . . ? Then would come

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sleep, and the awakening to another day of emerald green hills, red earth paths, blue sky, and sunlight.

She was sitting in the doorway of her burre weaving a mat when Ratu Madri came down the village path, and she watched him coming with mingled pleasure and confusion. What could she say? How explain her flight from the hills? She was not to know that he knew every detail.

Already she saw this man, with his fine carriage, silk sulu and spotless linen, in a new light — the reflected light of his surroundings. Her world was smaller now, and in it Ratu Madri loomed large. It gave her a thrill of pride to hear the people tama at his approach. To see how absolute was his control of them, and to know that he had paid her the highest compliment in his or any man's power.

As a matter of fact, Ratu Madri could hardly have chosen a more fitting moment for his visit to Niavu.

The entire village saw him stop before Marama's burre, and raise his hat; saw him smile and address her in a low, pleasant voice, and finally seat himself before her on the mats.

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Then it dispersed to its house and taro patch to talk for the rest of the day, and many days to come, of the great meke that would surely follow; of the presents it would give and the concessions it hoped for in return.

"So you have come back to us, Andi Marama," he was saying, and the girl knew that he had come for his answer and studied him quietly while he talked. His soft, brown eyes were very kind as they rested upon her. "Yes," she was thinking, "he would be kind. . . ."

They travelled to the coast in canoes, and there transhipped to the launch. To Marama that journey down the river was a fascinating dream, and the brilliantly decorated crafts with their joyous crews of brown-skinned men and women filled her with a new delight in her mother's people. Here was the very essence of Fiji — even as Ratu Madri had promised — and she was a part of it — the main essential.

The launch was a bower of tropical flowers and creepers, and in the bows a party of Fijians sang in sonorous chorus as they glided through the water. Marama lay back on the cushions, captive to the spell of the moment, and Ratu

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Madri knew better than to disturb her. All had been arranged. That night she was to occupy his house, with a few women in attendance, and in the morning they were to be married by a missionary from Levuka.

Out of the encroaching darkness Bau presently took shape, the launch slid alongside the landing, and together they walked down the palm-bordered avenue to the house.

At the verandah steps he kissed her for the first time.

"Good night, Andi Marama," he said gently, and turned abruptly from her.

Marama stood in the doorway watching his tall, powerfully built figure dissolve into the shadows of the avenue, but her thoughts were not with him. She was lost in fearful wonder at the sudden change that had come over herself. It was as though she had been sleeping and was now awake. The night was no longer beautiful; its shadows were forbidding, its moonlight ghostly. The house was no longer a supremely comfortable modern bungalow, but an empty white barn that, try as she would, she could not bring herself to look upon as her fu-

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ture home. Even her well-beloved sea lay cold and unresponsive below her. And the cause of the transformation she knew to be Ratu Madri's kiss.

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CHAPTER XIX

MARAMA AND CIRCUMSTANCE TOGETHER DEFY FATE

IN the small hours of the morning Marama awoke with a start. She had been dreaming of Templeton, and her mental vision still conjured his face, pale and tense, framed in the reed wall of a native house, as it had been on that night among the hills of Taviuni.

She could almost fancy that it was here, now, watching her out of the darkness. Then all fancy was driven from her mind by a sudden and terrifying fact. There was something moving, close beside her bed. Her first impulse was to scream, then it flashed into her mind that it might be one of the Ratu's women, and she lay still, hardly daring to breathe.

The room was pitch dark, for the reed shutters were down, but she could feel a presence close beside her, and it hardly came as a shock when a hand descended on her own. It was

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warm, and soft, and wonderfully reassuring. The whisper that accompanied it was essentially human.

"Him all right — all right," it kept repeating.

"Who are you? What do you want?" Marama demanded.

The words, clearly uttered, seemed to throw the other into a paroxysm of fear. The hand was joined by another, and both clasped Marama's in an agony of appeal.

"Too much noise," hissed the voice. "I Akanesi; I all right."

"Very well then," said Marama, "let me light the candle. What are you afraid of?"

But the hands tightened their grip.

"No, no; Ratu Madri him kill."

"Oh, nonsense; let me light the candle and we can talk. What do you want?"

The woman was beside her now on the bed. Marama could feel the trembling of her body, the fluttering of her frightened breath.

"You donno him, Ratu Madri," she whispered hoarsely. "I know him all right — dam bad sometime. I come tell you two men in big cutter want the mad turaga."

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"The mad turaga?"

Marama's confused mind groped after the other's meaning.

"Eo, Missi Templeto. Him no Missi Templeto; him Missi Craigie, and two men in big cutter want him bad."

"How do you know?"

Already Marama was sitting up in the bed, tense and motionless.

"They show me picture, all the same Missi Templeto picture, an' want him dam bad."

"Why?"

"I donno. They go Taviuni to-morrow."

Marama turned on the bed, wrenched her hand from its clinging embrace, and seized the other by the shoulders.

"Listen," she said in a tense voice. "You must go to Taviuni now — at once, somehow, and tell Missi Templeto this. Do you hear? I will give you anything I have, but you must go now — at once. Do you understand?"

There was no answer, and Marama shook the woman roughly. A faint snigger came out of the darkness.

"I no go," said Akanesi, now more at her

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ease. "You Mrs. Templeto — him like you all right — you like him all right. You go."

In a flash all was made clear to Marama. For some reason that interested her not at all, the woman was jealous of her as the intended wife of Ratu Madri. In some way, too, the other had divined her secret, and was using it to get her away from Bau. Was it a ruse? In any case it was overwhelmingly effective, for Marama knew now that there could be no rest for her while there remained even a possibility of the man she loved being in danger.

Her fingers sank into the other's soft flesh with all the strength that the tennis court and hockey field can impart to a girl.

"Are you lying?" she demanded fiercely.

"Sengai," wailed the half-strangled Akanesi, "him no lie, I promise."

Marama's grip relaxed, and a moment later the other had slid from the bed and crept noiselessly from the room.

For a few seconds Marama lay breathless, staring into the darkness, then she struck a match and, crossing to one of the bamboo shutters, peered out.

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The window overlooked the compound at the back of the house, and Marama could easily follow the woman's flitting figure in the half light of the stars. She was speeding towards the village, the grass roofs of which were just discernible, and seemed to have reached about half way when another figure — that of a man — emerged from one of the burres directly in her path. She stopped dead, and for a moment stood as though turned to stone, then fell suddenly forward, clasping the other about the knees.

For some time the man made no movement. Marama guessed that he was speaking. Then she saw his arm uplifted, and there was a stick in his hand. It descended — and again — and again, with a regularity that was almost mechanical. The woman was now cringing, now drooping, now a huddled heap at the man's feet; but the stick still continued to descend.

An indescribable little sound escaped Marama's lips, then she dropped the corner of the blind, and snatching up her wrapper from the foot of the bed, groped her way to the door. This she opened noiselessly, fled down the

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verandah steps, along the avenue, and out on to the beach.

The tide was in, and an outrigger canoe lay moored a few yards from shore. She swam out to it, hauled the stone anchor aboard, and was paddling out into the darkness like one possessed when a light sprang into being somewhere on Bau.

It came from the door of Ratu Madri's burre, where he lay back in a chair — still breathing heavily.

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CHAPTER XX

TAVIUNI!

THE dawn broke in a sullen glow to the east, as though nature had rung up her curtain on the day's happenings, and the wind stiffened with it, thrashing the sea into sudden life and movement.

The canoe tossed like a cork in the expanse of grey waters. Marama had been paddling mechanically for the last three hours, and now rested the dripping blade across the gunwales to look about her.

Far behind, the faint blue outline of Bau was still visible, and the sight of it nerved her to renewed effort. Again she saw the cringing, huddled woman, the towering, diabolical man with upraised arm, and she shuddered afresh. If he could so treat Akanesi — Akanesi who had fought unflinchingly with unseen danger in the burre at Munia — what could he not do to her, Marama? They were both women, separated

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only by a faint colour line, yet, and here lay the enigma, Marama knew *she* would not have cringed under that rain of blows. She would have fought like a wild-cat till she dropped.

That must be the difference between Akanesi and herself — between the white and the brown — the spirit that made it impossible for her to sink her own individuality and become a chattel, bound blindly by age-old tradition to do its chief's bidding, to suffer any indignity at his hands. She understood now what Templeton had meant when he had said it would be hell, and she thanked God that proof of his words had come in time.

But to Marama even these thoughts were transitory and of small account compared with the great question that had haunted her throughout the night; could she reach Taviuni in time to save the man who had fought so hard to save her? She knew him to be a fugitive — she had read it in his eyes — and that was all that mattered. Why, and by whom he was being pursued, never entered into her calculations. Perhaps the cutter had already sailed for Taviuni!

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She seized the clumsy paddle and bent to her task.

The wind was still rising, and now the foam-capped rollers licked the side of the canoe, drenching her to the skin and eddying about her feet, but still she paddled on. Ahead lay land — another of the four hundred odd islands composing the group, and the same as the rest in appearance — coral-rimmed, palm-fringed, vividly green. Luckily the tide was on the flow, and the white fangs of the barrier reef lay sufficiently deep to allow the shallow-draught canoe to pass over them unscathed.

Presently the frail craft was caught in the barrier breakers and whirled shoreward in a caldron of foam, while Marama clung desperately to the outrigger poles, seeing nothing, hearing nothing but the rush of white waters.

An outrigger canoe is almost unsinkable, otherwise she would not have been clambering up the beach a few minutes later to drop exhausted on the sand before a bevy of astonished natives who had watched her coming.

They took her to their village — or what was left of it after the hurricane — a few toppling

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grass houses, and a litter of reeds and rushes that showed the work of reconstruction was already under way.

The buli received her squatting on his bed, and smoking a poisonous saluka for effect. He talked a great deal, in spite of Marama's gestured protestations that his eloquence was wasted.

"White woman from the sea," he was saying, to the infinite delight of his innumerable relatives squatting about the floor. "White woman from the sea, it is well that you have come to Sanai Keba, for here you will be fed and clothed and returned to your men-folk in due season. A storm now rages — one of many that have visited us of late and destroyed our beautiful village — but when it has passed . . ."

For the fifth time Marama shook her dishevelled head, and waved her hands in token of incomprehension. The fat, tireless voice, which its owner loved so well, went monotonously on.

". . . we will see that you are returned to your men-folk. Our hospitality to the white vavalagi is well known throughout Vanua Levu. Once, the governor himself rested in Sanai Keba

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on his way to the great mbose, and ate of our prawns and taro. He said . . ."

"Taviuni!" Marama burst out in desperation. "I —" she beat her chest with her clenched hand, and pointed through the doorway at the sea, "I — Taviuni!"

The buli smiled blandly and tugged a horny foot closer to his groin.

"I understand you," he said serenely. "You shall be taken to your men-folk on Taviuni when the storm has passed. We love the white man here in Sanai Keba, and for his sake we will see that no harm comes to his women-folk. Alas, our guest-house was destroyed by the hurricane; a fine guest-house it was, the finest on Vanua Levu, with four king-posts and pictures woven on the rafters in coloured magi-magi, and a devil tree at each corner; but here in my home you are welcome to the food the women will bring, and at night . . ."

With a sinking heart Marama saw the futility of further protest. The man's head was made of wood and his tongue of leather. One thing she knew, and it gave her strength to bear the tension of suspense that was upon her. The

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coastwise Fijian is a born sailor — the finest of his kind in the South Pacific — and if he feared to face the weather, then the cutter would be storm-bound also. Marama recognised this as her opportunity, and it increased tenfold her agonised impatience to be gone.

The sight of three fat Fijian women advancing in ponderous procession with steaming fish on platters of banana leaf, irritated her beyond endurance. They had hardly placed the food on the mats when she crossed the room and scattered it with a sweep of her foot.

"Taviuni!" she cried; "Taviuni!" and even as the buli scrambled to his feet, and his innumerable relations jabbered their disapproval, a thought flashed into her mind — she must show that she was one of them, and not the white vavalagi they had taken her for! Very well; she sank to the mats, and there in her sodden wrapper and with streaming, dishevelled hair, danced the hurricane dance from beginning to end.

The effect was magical. At first, as her body commenced to sway, the audience sat dumb with astonishment. Then, as the sinuous, suggestive

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movements progressed, out of sheer habit it fell to chanting and clapping to the rhythm of them. Marama had gripped them as she had intended to grip them.

When it was finished, and she lay prone on the mats as the finale demanded, there was dead silence for a space, broken at last by deep-toned cries of "Vinaka! Vinaka!" (Very good! Very good!)

Here was a puzzle for the worthy inhabitants of Sanai Keba; a white vavalagi who danced their meke better than they! They clucked about it and continued to cluck, until the buli's sister-in-law's mother's cousin was seized with an inspiration, and took it upon himself to enlighten his august but obtuse relative. "Fool!" he whispered into his left ear, "it is the Andi Marama!"

"Impossible!" muttered the buli, but nevertheless stepped from his bed with something approaching alacrity on to the mats below, where, according to custom, he should have been from the moment his guest entered the house.

"It is the Andi Marama," he announced in an awed voice.

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Marama raised herself from the mats, and stood before him, a slight, imperious figure. She had caught and understood at least the last two words, and she well knew that it remained for her to make the most of them.

"Eo," she said, "Andi Marama — Taviuni!" Again she beat her breast and pointed through the low doorway to where the angry Pacific thundered on reef and beach.

The buli was plainly distraught and sought hurried council with his retinue. Marama caught the word "Ratu," and a low tama that ran round the circle of squatting figures; then the buli rose in their midst, and talked without halt or hesitation for upwards of five minutes. She was on the verge of further interruption, when the company broke up and dispersed, leaving three men squatting alone in the centre of the mat-strewn floor.

They were all splendid specimens of the present-day Fijian — handsome of face, square-shouldered, lean-loined and muscular. Marama knew instinctively that they had been selected as her escort, and her heart throbbed its gratitude. With a stately inclination of the head,

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and a murmured "samoce" (farewell) to the buli, who looked as if he had a great deal more to say and was aching to say it, Marama passed outside.

The three men, as she had expected, followed her down to the beach. Here their attention seemed divided between the preparation of a sturdy outrigger canoe and the fearsome rollers that pounded the beach and sucked the shingle hissing into its embrace. But the buli and his retinue were watching their movements from an eminence; moreover, the Andi Marama was standing close by in her fluttering wrapper, gazing straight out to sea, and there was nothing for it but to carry the madness to its conclusion — whatever that might be. If they succeeded, the "great one" would undoubtedly be pleased. If they failed — they would at least escape his displeasure in this world.

Ten feverish minutes they spent, with the surf buffetting, blinding and choking them, and the canoe, with the Andi Marama clinging to a thwart, jerking them from their feet in its endeavours to turn broadside on; then there came one of those momentary lulls when enraged Na-

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ture seems to pause for breath, and the canoe shot out and up — climbing the face of a green mountain of water to tremble an instant on its crest before falling sheer into the valley beyond.

By some miracle the Fijians were aboard and paddling madly. Three such mountains the canoe climbed, seemingly but a second before they broke, and three such valleys it traversed without being engulfed; then a tiny rag of lugsail fluttered to the mast, and it headed for the open sea, with two of its crew bailing for their lives, and the third clinging desperately to the paddle rudder.

"It was well done," shouted the Buli of Sanai Keba in the teeth of the wind, as he watched the speck of lugsail, now visible, now hidden, beating up for the channel in the reef. "It is certain that none but the people of Sanai Keba could have done such a thing. It is certain that Ratu Madri will remember Sanai Keba when next he attends the great mbose."

The innumerable relations clucked their assent, and the buli continued to shout, until it occurred to him that he would be better heard in his own house.

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CHAPTER XXI

MARAMA ACCOMPANIES THE MAD TURAGA TO EARTH

TEMPLETON had long since searched every likely place for Marama Thurston. The cataclysm of the hurricane, following so closely on his nerve-racking encounter with Maddon among the cocoanut groves, had left him dazed. But in spite of this, in spite of his wounded arm, which pained him so much since the bullet had been extracted by a native doctor that he feared blood poisoning, he had penetrated as far inland as Niavu. But the bland buli of that charming hill village had protested his ignorance of any such person as Marama Thurston, much less of her whereabouts.

Templeton was forced to the conclusion that she was either dead, and buried somewhere beneath the débris of fallen trees that littered the coast of Taviuni from end to end, or had found

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asylum in some village he had been unable to reach. In any case, he could search no more, for when at last he struggled back to the coast, it took all his small reserve of strength to collect a few fallen nuts and crawl for shelter among the ruins of "Cadogan Mansions."

Since then, acute pain had alternated with oblivion, until one morning he crawled forth in search of more nuts, and saw an outrigger canoe under full sail heading straight for shore.

It was manned by a crew of three, and no sooner had its prow touched the sand than a woman sprang from the deck and hurried up the beach.

It was Marama Thurston, and at sight of her Templeton almost swooned.

"I must give them money," she said hurriedly, seeming hardly to look at him, or give a thought to his pitiable condition, "and I have none."

"Give them tobacco," said Templeton, summoning a sickly smile to his white lips. "You'll find some in the tin trunk under the bed — or where the bed was."

She was gone perhaps three minutes, then she emerged from the overturned house with a bun-

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dle of leaves under her arm and, hurrying down the beach, distributed them between the waiting men.

"You must tell me all," she said, returning presently and kneeling in the sand at his side, "and I will tell you all, but first, listen.—There is a cutter anchored off Bau, and they are looking for — some one."

She wanted to break it gently; he was not fit to stand any sudden shock, and it went to her heart to see the muscles of his face grow suddenly tense, and the furtive look come into his eyes. She turned her face towards the sea.

"And who is it they want?" he asked evenly.

"A man called Craig," she said, still gazing over the water.

So, after two years, it had come. The man instinctively squared his shoulders to meet it. Then his glance travelled to the girl at his side, and the desire of life and liberty took hold of him suddenly, fiercely. Absurd remembrances of childhood flashed through his brain. He was playing hide-and-seek; running madly over a green lawn towards an oak tree that was "home," with nerve and muscle tense, haunted

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by an imaginary someone at his heels. His hand went out unconsciously and touched Marama's arm.

"I am Craig," he said.

"I know," she answered quickly, turning for the first time; "they have a photograph — the same that you showed Akanesi."

Craig moistened his lips and leant more heavily against the verandah support.

"Did they say why they — want me?"

"No."

"I will tell you some day," he said, "if — if — but now!" The hunted look had returned to his eyes.

"You must get away from here," said Marama, leaning eagerly over him, tense with excitement. "Can you walk? Try. You *must* try; look! It is only a few yards to the scrub; you will be safe there."

Craig struggled to his feet, and for a moment stood swaying dizzily, then stumbled up the beach. Marama went before him, and when at last he had covered the seemingly interminable distance between "Cadogan Mansions" and the beach road, she made him lie in the grass while

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she fought and burrowed a way into the strong tangle of the underbrush.

When she returned, he was unconscious.

It was evening before she had found a suitable place, and with infinite care half led, half carried him to it.

During the hurricane, three stately palms had crashed down into a dabi tree, bending some of its branches to the ground, thus forming an arbour of dense foliage. Here, for two days, Craig lay on a bed of palm leaves and grass, conscious only of Marama's gentle presence as she came and went with fruit and water, or dressed his injured arm. The sense of security allowed other thoughts to crowd his brain. He was safe. Absolutely safe, so long as he remained like a rat in its hole. But was it worth while? Life would be this, and repetitions of this, to the end, unless he renounced all hope of return to his own world; unless . . .

Directly before him the curtain of leaves parted, and Marama crept in, dragging a bunch of bananas after her. For a while she busied herself tying it to a branch overhead, then she stole softly to his side.

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Craig lay with closed eyes, very still, on his soft bed of her own making. Marama stood looking down on him. Who was he? What was he? To her it mattered not at all. He had needed her help, and she had given it with a joy the fullness of which she had hardly dared to admit, even to herself.

How she had revelled in protecting him, caring for him! The finding of their nest, here among the undergrowth of Taviuni; the "furnishing" of it with a mat of roughly-woven reeds, cocoanut-shell drinking-cups, bamboo water-holders and banana-leaf platters to hold the land-crab, shell-fish and bread-fruit that she had cooked far down the beach that the smoke might not betray their hiding place; the furtive excursions along the beach to acquaint herself with the whereabouts and movements of the two white men who had landed from the cutter — this last a matter she had kept a profound secret for fear of alarming him. All these things had been the keenest of joys to Marama Thurston.

As she stood there looking down on him, she wondered how long they would last. This man and woman had told each other much during

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these two days — much, but until this moment, not all.

Presently Craig could feel her warm breath on his face as he lay quite still with half-closed eyes. Her hair brushed his cheek, and the sweet proximity of her being stole over him like an opiate, deadening every thought other than that of the present and what it held — for him. His arm went out feebly, drawing her down to him, and she lay there, silent and unresisting. . . .

When she spoke it was in a scarcely audible whisper, her lips close to his ear.

"The cutter is here; they have anchored off the beach."

"What does it matter?" said the man. "What does anything matter? I killed a man — over there, Marama. That is why they want me. I struck him and he died." His voice rang defiant. "I would strike him again for the same cause."

For a time there was silence, intensified by the far-off murmur of the reef.

"It was three years ago," he went on presently, more to himself than to her, though Marama knelt close beside him watching his lips

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as they framed the words, his eyes as they stared straight up into the green recesses of the dabi tree, "and it happened at the club. 'The Wasters' we used to call it, though that wasn't its name — a little, cosy place off St. James's Street.

"There were only thirty of us. We thought ourselves very select, and we thought we knew one another pretty well; but some men you never known, and Carew was like that. He was one of those sleek, precious chaps who pretend to dislike women but are never out of their society if they can help it. There are lots of them, and they're called ladies' men, but they're not; they're lady men — feminine in mind and masculine in body — the most hateful combination ever bred by circumstance. I always detested him, and he knew it and smirked whenever we met. I can see his smirk now."

Craig's hand went out.

"Am I wearying you?"

Marama took it between her own.

"Go on," she said; "please go on."

Craig moistened his lips.

"It doesn't matter how," he said, "but by ac-

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cident I overheard him talking about a friend of mine — talking in a way that *men* don't talk. I asked him to repeat what he had said — to me. He smirked at me. I made him repeat it; then I hit him. I said just now that there are some men you never know. I don't think many men know themselves, until the moment comes that teaches them. I had hit this lady man, and I have known for the last three years that I should hit him again under the same circumstances. I have learnt that much about myself. The trouble is we were in the billiard room at the time, and he fell backwards, catching the base of his skull on the corner of the billiard table — the pocket, you know. Somebody — a doctor — said something about 'spinal cord . . . severed,' and I was hustled out of the room. A man came in to us a little later, and I could see by his face what had happened. He talked to the others very quietly for a minute or so, then they took me in a cab to the station, and we caught the night mail for Marseilles.

"The whole thing seemed to me a sort of ghastly dream, until I woke up on the *Ballarat* and remembered what they had dinned into me

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the night before: I was John Templeton, a globe-trotter bound for Sydney.

"That voyage seemed to take a year, and every time I heard the wireless sputtering out a message, I broke into a cold sweat. I went down to meals and imagined everybody staring at me — that my secret was out. Oh, I tell you, I learnt on that voyage what it is to have killed a man — even a lady man."

Craig drew away his hand and pressed it to his forehead, damp with the dew of weakness. Marama offered him water from the bamboo, but he waved it aside.

"Never mind now," she said; "some other time . . ."

Craig looked round at her.

"There may not be another time," he said; "that's why I'm telling you now. Do you still want to hear?"

She nodded.

"Nothing happened," said Craig; "but I had been through the torture of being found out a hundred times every day. You'd think a man would get hardened to it in time; perhaps some do, but to me it only got worse. Nothing hap-

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pened at Sydney either, but going down the gangplank I could feel my knees trembling, and my heart pounding like a sledge. God knows I felt what I was, and what I shall always be — a murderer fleeing from justice, but added to this I thought I must look it, too. It seemed a miracle to me that I was not stopped at every corner. I dared not buy a newspaper. A hundred times I was on the point of giving myself up and making an end to it, but I always funked it at the last moment. It was just the same kind of funk that prevents nine people out of ten from committing suicide. I realised that I was a coward as well. . . .

"Sydney was too like London — people everywhere. I wanted to lose myself and the world, and here on Taviuni for a while I thought I had done it. Then came the craving to go home. It was almost worse than the other. Only those who have been forced — you understand — *forced* to live out of their own country, and know that they can never go back to it, can realise what it means. God, how I longed to go back! But I got even this under control in time, and was in a fair way to developing into the

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soulless jellyfish I longed to become, when you came and spoilt it."

"I? Spoilt it?"

"Yes, you, Marama; you spoilt it by bringing me to my senses with a round turn. At first you brought back to me in a headlong rush all that I was trying to forget — refinement, gentleness, culture, and oh, all the hundred and one other things great and small that make the difference between civilisation and savagery. I was not born a savage. I was educating myself into being one — pretending already that I was one, and you, as I saw you on the tennis court at Vuna, pulled me up short. You stood for all that I was exiled from, and it sickened me afresh. Then, when I saw you trying to throw aside the selfsame things that I had so nearly succeeded in throwing aside myself, it startled me into activity. I knew the symptoms and where they led. With myself it was of no great consequence, but with you the thing was unthinkable, and so — I tried to fight for you, Marama."

The girl still knelt at his side.

"You won," she said very quietly.

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"I won," said Craig; "and now —" His pale lips twitched into a bitter smile. "A cutter is anchored off the beach! Is there no end to it — no peace? By God!" he exclaimed with sudden fierceness, struggling into a sitting posture, "if I get out of this, we'll go south — and still south, until we lose this cursed world of white men for good and all. Marama, will you come?"

The girl sat very still for a space; then she turned to him, and her brown eyes looked into his. There was a question in them that seemed to find an answer, for at last she leant towards him and their lips met — but only for an instant; the next she had slipped from his side, and the man was left staring at the swaying branches where she had vanished.

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CHAPTER XXII

WHICH INTRODUCES TWO STRANGERS AND SOME CONFLICTING FEELINGS

"IF John's not a dead man, he's a fool," said the fat stranger with spluttered emphasis. "Two years — and never read a newspaper — he can't have or he'd have seen it. What one-horsed rag between here and Sydney haven't we advertised in?"

He fanned himself with weary precision and waited for a response that was not forthcoming.

After a wearisome and fruitless day spent in searching the ruins of "Cadogan Mansions," and wandering along the sun-scorched beaches eliciting the same response from every native they encountered — "The mad turaga is gone; we know not where nor when he will return," — the owners of the schooner anchored off the beach had sought refuge from the mosquitoes in their cabin. The three Fijians who composed

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the crew had gone ashore to spear fish by torch-light up the coast.

The fat stranger, seated on a ridiculously narrow locker, let the fan fall to his side and eyed his companion with a glance determined, yet tentative. His duck jacket hung in damp folds about his neck, and the perspiration stood in beads on his seamless, pink forehead.

"I propose that we abandon the thing as hopeless," he suggested, and awaited the effect of the announcement with the air of one who has launched a thunderbolt.

His companion turned slowly, his thin lips and steel-grey eyes showing his disgust.

"You've been doing that ever since we left Suva," he said mildly.

The fat stranger spluttered.

"That's not true. Milton is my nephew, and I've left no stone unturned. I've paid — let me see —" He fumbled in the folds of his shapeless jacket for his notebook.

The other turned on him in a flash.

"Damn what you've paid!" he jerked out. "Heavens! man, don't you see that it's worth more than money to find him. He still thinks

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that he killed Carew — try and think of that. Try and think what it is to be ostracised from everything worth while. To live with imaginary hounds forever on your scent. It must be hell! And all for nothing. Have you ever seen the end of a white man 'gone native'? I have. Milton has probably gone native. He's living down in the Solomons or the Tongas with a wife as fat and black as a porpoise — and all for nothing. Won't you ever see what's at the end of our trail?"

The fat stranger looked hurt.

"I have reason to be Milton's friend," the other went on more slowly, "and I shall go on with it — and on. If he had killed Carew instead of only giving him half of what he deserved, it would still be the least I could do; there's the girl."

The fat stranger mopped himself irritably.

"Yes," he admitted, "as you say — there's the girl."

He struggled laboriously from the locker and laid a fleshy hand on the other's shoulder.

"Grieve," he said; "I'm worse than useless in anything like this, and there's no need for me

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to tell you so either. You go on. Do everything — everything. But I know you will, and er — of course you will allow me to —"

"Pay? Why, certainly!" said the other shortly; and the fat stranger was still fumbling for his notebook as they ascended the companion.

On deck he suddenly seized the other by the arm.

"What's that?" he spluttered, pointing into the darkness.

His companion apparently took little interest, and he was left staring after a round, dark object that moved slowly along the surface of the water for a few yards, and vanished.

"You seem upset, Grieve," he remarked with an injured air, and subsided heavily into a deck chair.

"I am," said the other, and commenced to pace the deck, trailing a cloud of tobacco smoke.

Marama had been considered an unusually strong swimmer at school; but it taxed all her strength to reach the shore. Her fingers, too, were still numb from the strain of supporting her weight at the cutter's port-hole, but she was hardly conscious of these things. *"If he had*

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killed . . . all for nothing . . . there's the girl. . . ." The disjointed sentences sang in her brain like a dirge. It meant that he was free! That during these happy days when she had thought — and revelled in the thought — that he was utterly dependent upon her, she had actually been holding him captive.

There's the girl! . . . If he knew that he was free, she, Marama, would be less than nothing to him. She was the make-shift of an exile!

So one bitter thought followed another, but always the one remained, like some giant rock against which the waves beat in vain: She — could — not — let — him — go! She would tell him after — to make him quite happy, and then — Why not now?

That night she sat on the beach, staring stonily into the darkness, as hour after hour went by. She could not bring herself to go to their home, for she looked upon it as that; it was more of a home than any she had known. She felt that she could not look him in the face and keep silent.

In the morning, soon after a blood-red sun had leapt from the sea, there was a creaking of block

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and tackle, shouted orders, and the impatient flapping of glistening white canvas on board the cutter; and Marama heard, and saw, and sat quite motionless.

Two white figures came on deck and watched the preparations for departure, and Marama seized handfuls of her hair and pressed them to her eyes.

With the clanking of the anchor chain she sprang to her feet. For a moment she seemed to hesitate, then sped down the beach to the water's edge, launched a canoe in frenzied haste, and paddled out to sea.

"What the devil's this?" said the man called Grieve, shading his eyes from the glare and looking astern. The water had begun to ripple past the cutter's sides as she came up to the wind.

"I don't know," said the fat stranger, in a tone that showed he was also very far from caring.

"It's a canoe," said Grieve, "a canoe and a woman, and she's standing up waving; what the deuce can she want?"

"Money," responded the fat stranger. "I've

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never known 'em to want anything else in these parts — or any other for that matter."

"There — and," Grieve had snatched up his glasses, "by all that's holy — she's white — or confoundedly near it!"

"Half-caste, probably."

"And she's waving and yelling like mad."

"Wants money badly," suggested the other.

"Hanged if I don't heave-to; you never know."

The fat stranger sighed comprehensively.

"For heaven's sake, let's get out of here, Grieve! If you heave-to for every canoe and yelling half-caste between here and Suva . . ."

But the order had already been given, and the cutter lay with idly-flapping canvas, while the canoe came nearer and nearer and finally shot alongside.

"What do you want?" roared Grieve in execrable Fijian.

For a moment the half-caste in the blue wrapper, rising and falling at the ship's side, was too breathless to answer. She had paddled hard. Then she looked up at the two faces above her.

"You are looking for a man named Craig," she said, in the precisest of English.

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The fat stranger was startled into unaccustomed silence, and Grieve into instant courtesy.

"I beg your pardon," he said, raising his solar topee, "I — er — that is yes, we —"

"If you will come with me," said the half-caste who spoke such extraordinarily good English, "I will take you to him."

They were rowed ashore in the dinghy, with the canoe trailing astern.

"Do you mean to say —" began the fat stranger, but the other trod carefully on his toe, and they continued on their way in silence. It was a strange journey.

At the beach road, the fat stranger subsided into the grass and fanned himself. The other paced back and forth with long, nervous strides.

"Good God, if it should be Milton! After all this —" he kept muttering. "After all this . . ."

"Don't talk of it," sighed the fat stranger, and fell to fanning himself with renewed vigour.

The half-caste in the blue wrapper had told them to wait here and she would bring him to them, and they waited, each in his own way, for they knew not what.

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Presently a man burst from the bushes that fringed the beach road and staggered into the open. One arm was in a sling, the other was outstretched towards them, when he pitched suddenly forward, almost at their feet. For a moment they both knelt over him, looking into his face, then they carried him to the dinghy waiting on the beach, and tended him while they were being rowed to the cutter.

The half-caste in the blue wrapper stood on the beach, shading her eyes from the glare of a newly risen sun, and watched the distance devour them.

About an hour later Milton Craig opened his eyes to a stretch of bellying canvas, and the vision of a large, perspiring face bending anxiously over him.

"Uncle!" he said.

"Thank God!" said the fat stranger. "Lie still, Milton."

Craig promptly sat up.

"She told me that it was a mistake," he said dazedly, "that . . ."

"So it was, so it was," the fat stranger spluttered jubilantly. "Carew's all right. We've

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been hunting you nearly a year, Milton. We swore we'd find you, if we had to go down to the Solomons, and . . ."

But his nephew had swung from the chair and walked aft unsteadily. He leaned over the taff-rail looking out over the boat's wake to where the faint outline of an island danced in the shimmering heat haze.

The fat stranger hurried to the cabin.

"Grieve," he said, "it's all right; Milton's come round, but he's thinking of that confounded half-caste already."

"Leave him to me," said the other, and strode towards the companion.

On the bottom step he met Craig.

"It's been tremendously good of you, Grieve," he said slowly, "and you, uncle, but I didn't say I wanted to leave Taviuni — just yet. I'm afraid I must trouble you to put back."

It was dark under the dabi tree when Craig held aside the branches. Something still darker lay in a far corner of the little arbour, and he leant over it. It was the remains of the grass and palm-leaf bed. The bamboo water-holder

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still leant against the trunk of the tree. The cocoanut-shell drinking-cups lay side by side close to it; the banana-leaf platters, too, were stacked in a neat pyramid, ready for use. Overhead hung the bunch of ripening bananas.

Craig's eye mechanically took in every detail as he stood there — alone, staring wildly about him.

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CHAPTER XXIII

INTRODUCES AN OLD FRIEND

CRAIG might well look about him. Marama had not returned to the dabi tree. The cutter had no sooner dissolved into the distant heat-haze than she turned, and with compressed lips and upright carriage, walked quickly up the beach road.

There was nothing in her mind to direct her steps; she only felt the necessity of movement in any form to deaden the ache of heart and brain. She even found herself noting the clean-cut shadows cast by the wreckage of bordering palms across the beach road, a mina bird that hopped and fluttered along before her, and the ceaseless crackling of the soldier crabs scuttling in and out of their holes in the wet sand.

Fate could rob her of nothing more, she reflected, when at last she came to think coherently. As far as she, Marama Thurston, half-caste, was concerned, life, which had hitherto

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held the wildest possible extremes of joy and sorrow, hope and despair, was now a void in which she moved alone, without motive. She could laugh at fate. She did laugh — aloud, and startled herself into wondering if she were mad.

The hardening process in the evolution of Marama Thurston had already begun.

Still she walked, with the easy, swinging stride acquired with her wrapper, until she found herself on the borders of Munia. The home she had never been able to look upon as home, was a dismal sight, but it touched no responsive chord of feeling in Marama.

The bungalow was blown clean away, leaving the verandah supports sprouting stark from the ground. A section of the corrugated iron roof glinted in the sunlight, wedged inches deep in the trunk of a palm fifty yards away, and others littered the ground, together with broken glass, timber and twisted palm trunks. Not a burre was left standing; not a thing that had dared to rear itself three feet from the ground on that night when nature had chosen to assert her might.

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A little further on, and in a tiny space free from the tangle of fallen trees, Marama came upon an oblong mound of lately turned earth, perhaps six feet in length. She stood for a moment regarding it absently; then it occurred to her that this must be her father's grave. She found herself wondering if they had buried him in his faded green dressing-gown with the frayed edges, and turned abruptly away. Her own strange conjecture angered her. She wondered again if she were mad.

The beach was now the only place where unhampered progress was possible, so Marama went down to the hard, wet sand, laid bare by the receding tide, and walked on.

The soldier-crabs crackled and scuttled about her feet, and an inquisitive hurricane bird wheeled overhead, wondering what this lonely, restless being below him might be. It was blue, and it moved very slowly after the fashion of these earth things, but always it moved. Then his quick eye caught the glint of prey in the shallows, and he swooped head foremost, forgetting the blue being who moved so tirelessly, forgetting all that was in his power to remember, in

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the delight of finding something plump and glistening white, wriggling in the grip of his powerful beak.

The round ball of the sun faded from blinding yellow to a more restful copper colour as it sank towards the horizon, but Marama felt no fatigue.

When she looked up from the sand, she found herself close to the ruins of a landing stage, and up the green slopes of grass to her left, the four stone walls of a roofless house. She had walked as far as Vuna.

Here was some life and movement. A couple of tents had been pitched in the compound, and people — two women in loose white dresses, and coolie house-boys — moved round about them. Marama stood watching them, until one of the women paused with her hand to her eyes and pointed towards the beach. It was too late to obey the impulse to flee from these people she dreaded meeting, and a moment later Mrs. Harte was at her side.

"My dear child, where have you been?"

Marama looked back into her pale eager face and forced a smile to her lips; but her eyes had not escaped Mrs. Harte.

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"You must come up to the tent," she hurried on, without waiting for an answer to her question. "Miss Halliday would never forgive me. She has been talking of nothing but you for the last week — we — isn't it dreadful, dreadful — the worst for thirty years, George says. I thought it was the end of the world. . . ."

Miss Halliday stood under the tent awning, watching them approach. Her observant eye took in every detail of the girl in the blue wrapper — her feet, naked and bruised, the dark brown tint of her skin, her dishevelled hair, even the curious absent look in her eyes.

"Good Heavens!" a house-boy heard her murmur, but there was not the faintest trace of surprise on her small, expressive face as she went out to Marama, only unfeigned delight at their meeting.

"You can't think how good it is to see you again," she chirped, kissing her warmly; "but you look tired out."

"Sit there, child," said Mrs. Harte, forcing her gently into a wicker chair. "Heaven knows we all have our troubles these days, but there's al-

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ways tea; we were just going to have some; you're in luck!"

"It's quite like old times," beamed Miss Halliday. "Just fancy, it's only three months since we were having tea over there, where the verandah isn't — what a lot can happen in three months! The world moves faster in the tropics, in spite of all they say to the contrary — forced I suppose."

Marama was leaning forward looking down at her feet, and remembering them as they had been — encased in spotless white shoes — three months ago.

"Yes," she said, without looking up, "a lot can happen in three months."

"And you're right about the world moving faster in the tropics," put in Mrs. Harte quickly, as she negotiated the boiling water. "A trifle too fast for some of us." She grimaced towards the wrecked plantation. "No sooner is the place blown to the ground, than George is out with the labour from daylight to dark, prying it up again. The house — my poor house — is left to take care of its battered self while the palms that still have roots in the ground are

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being propped up on rock supports — George discovered that they grow again like that."

"The palm is a wonderful tree," murmured Miss Halliday, as though repeating a well-learnt lesson. "To begin with it shows its good taste in always leaning towards the sea. Then it supplies food, drink, light and clothing, and what more can be expected from anyone or anything I'm sure I can't imagine."

Marama listened to these two kindly women assiduously talking trivialities for her benefit, but she was far too indifferent to things about her to be grateful. She knew that courtesy demanded of her some account of her doings during the past three months, but this demand she flatly refused; what was courtesy to her? From these well-meaning women it would exact sympathy, and that she dreaded now with the whole parched soul of her.

And so she alternately sipped the cup of tea that had been given her and studied her naked feet while the others talked on. It gave her a certain savage satisfaction to know what a figure she must cut in that well-ordered tent. Now they could see her as she was, neither the deli-

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cate thing of frills and furbelows, aping the English lady, nor the primitive savage in seed necklaces, but Marama Thurston — half-caste! Well, what did they think of her? Little she cared!

She placed the cup on the table and got to her feet.

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Harte," she said; "I must be going."

"But —" Mrs. Harte made a nervous movement, then caught Miss Halliday's twinkling eye over Marama's shoulder and smiled. "So soon!" she said. "I'm sorry. You must run over again when things are a little more settled. Good-bye for now, dear."

She kissed her and turned abruptly to the tea things.

"Good-bye, Miss Halliday," said Marama, a trifle stridently. "I hope the first impressions are accumulating, though I'm afraid you'll find them rather deceptive in this part of the world."

"You think so?" blinked Miss Halliday gravely. "I have not found them so. If you don't mind, I'll walk with you as far as the gate."

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They had not covered half the distance, when Miss Halliday stopped to tie her shoe-lace.

"Marama," she said, tying a rapid, practical bow; "don't you want to hear what I've been doing all these months?"

Marama looked down on the bent head, with its sparse hair streaked with grey scratched back from the shiny, intelligent forehead, into a tight little bun. Sympathy was stalking near. Instinctively she steeled herself against it.

"What you really mean," she said with slow deliberation, "is — if you tell me all you've been doing, will I tell you all I've been doing?"

Miss Halliday straightened herself, and looked at Marama in mild surprise.

"No," she said, "I didn't mean that; whatever made you think that I did?"

Marama was angrily conscious that she was flushing under the other's direct gaze.

"Think what splendid copy it would make!" she taunted.

"My dear child," responded Miss Halliday, with a slight elevation of the eyebrows, "I have a pile of copy in my tent that will see me into my grave, and provide a handsome legacy for a

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needy relative of my acquaintance. It has been a wonderful three months — wonderful! Where shall we sit — here on the beach? Very well."

She launched forth on a detailed and enthusiastic account of her wanderings amongst the group, and Marama listened — indifferently at first; then, with an unconscious dawn of warmth, as she realised that Miss Halliday's enthusiasm was genuine; that she was not talking for her (Marama's) benefit, but simply because she wanted to tell these things to some one who would take an interest in them. Marama found herself taking an interest, in spite of herself. Miss Halliday was clever in more ways than her "small, but loyal public" knew.

"I'm glad," said Marama quietly, but with something of her old self in the tone of her voice. "I'm glad you had a good time."

"And to cap all," Miss Halliday hurried on, "I was here for a hurricane! I was praying for that before I came — not for a hurricane, you know — but if there was one, that I might be here. I shall never forget it, not one second of it, as long as I live. I was on Mago at the time. There was a solid, advancing wall of water

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twenty feet high, and the wind! It wasn't wind; it was God's hand sweeping up a few crumbs — I must remember that."

"I know," said Marama, "I could tell you something about hurricanes. I was at Munia. It killed my father, and it wrecked Munia. As you say, I think it was God's hand — cleaning things up."

Miss Halliday sat blinking out to sea.

"I shouldn't talk about it, if I were you, Marama," she said. "It must have been awful — awful! Besides, there's no need; I heard about it all."

"I expect you did," said Marama. And both women knew they were not referring to the hurricane.

Marama turned and looked into the other's face for the first time.

"Perhaps you heard of my sister, Moala," she said; "where is she?"

"Mrs. Harte told me she had gone to Suva," replied Miss Halliday. "It appears she has friends there."

"I'm glad of that," mused Marama; "she will be happy there."

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There was a long pause while both women looked before them over the darkening sea. Presently Marama scrambled to her feet.

"It's late," she said; "I must be going."

Miss Halliday looked up at her.

"Where to?" she demanded coolly.

Marama's lips were parted to answer, when she closed them again and flung back her head with a movement of defiance the other knew well.

"I don't know," she said, with equal abruptness.

"Then you can't possibly be in a hurry," said Miss Halliday, "and if you'll just sit down here again for a minute, I'll tell you."

"Tell me? Tell me what?"

"Where you are going."

Marama obeyed in silence. Miss Halliday gripped her unnecessarily short skirt about her knees.

"You're coming back to my tent for to-night and to-morrow night, and the next afternoon you'll sail with me on the *Amra*, first for Suva, and then for England."

Marama laughed a hard little laugh.

"It sounds exhilarating," she said; "but I

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didn't know the *Amra* or the other lines gave free passages to any one, let alone half-castes."

"They don't," said Miss Halliday, without moving a muscle; "but I shall book your passage, and you can pay me when — when you have got some sort of employment over in dear old fog-land. You can't deceive me into believing that you can't earn something, as well as the sickly specimens you see doing it over there."

There was silence for a while. Marama was thinking at last — rapidly, coherently. Miss Halliday could have executed a hornpipe on the spot, as she watched the thoughts reflected in the girl's face.

Presently she turned, and Miss Halliday noticed with a throb of joy the softened expression of her eyes.

"What a dear you are," she said, but her voice was so low that the words were hardly audible above the murmur of the reef. "What a dear!" Then she laughed, a short, low laugh, while the tears still trembled in her eyes. "It's all right," she added, with a glint of mischief; "I'm not going to cry — this time."

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CHAPTER XXIV

FAREWELL TO FIJI

NEVERTHELESS, it was a different Marama who boarded the *Amra* two days later, to the one who had come ashore in a copra punt three months before. The change in her was inevitable — probably ineradicable — and Mrs. Harte sighed as she turned from watching the steamer's diminishing stern and toiled up the shell pathway to the compound.

There was a sealed envelope in her hand. Marama had given it to her at the last moment, and the girl's parting words recurred to her: "Read it when I've gone, and please — *please* do as I ask."

Mrs. Harte sighed again when she had read the note it contained.

"I suppose I must," she mused, "but —"

Two days later, an unusually trim cutter anchored off Vuna Point, and Craig came

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ashore in the dinghy. His arm was still in a sling, and his face was pale and drawn.

"We're coasting round Taviuni," he told Mrs. Harte; "and I thought I'd call in. My uncle and a friend are on board, and they're gasping to come ashore, but I made them stay until I had a word with you." His hands were clasped and working nervously. "Have you seen anything of Miss Thurston?"

The question could hardly have been put more awkwardly. Mrs. Harte looked back into his gravely eager face. "Please — *please* do as I ask!" There was nothing for it then but the lie direct.

"No," she said, "why?"

It seemed to her that Craig's broad shoulders drooped a trifle lower.

"I can't make it out," he said, ignoring her question, and staring with puckered brow through the tent door. "It's — it's beyond me."

"Would a whisky and soda help?" suggested Mrs. Harte.

He smiled at that, a wan, fleeting smile.

"I'm afraid not, thanks," he said. "She's gone, Mrs. Harte — clean gone!"

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"And you are looking for her?"

"Looking for her!" Craig glanced up. Mrs. Harte had never before struck him as a dense woman. There was evidently nothing like being in a parlous state oneself to discover the qualities of others. "Yes," he ended more slowly, "I'm looking for her. Good-bye, and thank you, Mrs. Harte; we must be getting on to Soma Soma."

"But won't those two poor men come ashore after all?"

"I think we'd better be getting on, thanks all the same." And Craig was half-way to the beach before Mrs. Harte realised he had gone.

"I hope I have done right," she mused, watching the dinghy creep out from shore.

Meanwhile, a transformation had taken place in Suva. The pretty half-caste in the blue wrapper, evidently maid to the weird little lady in unnecessarily short skirts, had emerged one morning in the McDonald Hotel dining-room as a plainly but neatly dressed European — or as near it as the Suva shops could attain.

The dining-room — mostly occupied by men

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— conceded that the transformation was a complete success. It began to doubt if she were, after all, maid to the weird little lady. It even had its misgivings as to whether she were even a half-caste.

There is little else to do than to speculate in Suva hotel dining-rooms.

"That's five pounds so far," said Marama, making a pencil note on a scrap of paper, as they emerged on Victoria Parade, and sauntered towards the shipping office.

"What a shockingly bad advertisement Suva is!" was Miss Halliday's irrelevant rejoinder. "Fancy this steaming, dolorous village being the capital of our incomparable Fiji! Thank heaven there are only two more days before the *Zelandia.*"

In the shipping office there was an awkward moment.

"I want one first single to Sydney by the *Zelandia,*" said Miss Halliday, and the clerk turned to the passenger lists.

Marama drew Miss Halliday aside. There was added colour in her cheeks, but her lips were firmly set.

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"I'm going steerage," she announced in an undertone.

"Nonsense!" protested Miss Halliday.

"I mean it. And I'm going under another name, as I did on the *Amra*."

"My dear child, I don't mind what you call yourself for other people's benefit or confusion, so long as I know you as Marama; but steerage — !"

"It's quite good enough for me," Marama insisted. "Besides, I can't afford any more. Please don't make it impossible — now!"

Miss Halliday snorted but succumbed.

"As it is, I shall be thirty pounds in your debt by the time we reach London," Marama added, when they were again out in the sunshine.

"What a remarkably fine specimen of a native," commented Mrs. Halliday, tilting her green-lined umbrella to get a better view of the Fijian who approached them along the narrow pavement. He was tall and distinctly striking in appearance. He wore a silk sulu and a panama hat. Moreover, he walked with a leisurely, erect carriage, and general air of se-

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renity that bespoke a natural and complete indifference to those about him. Behind him, at a respectful distance, followed a faithful servitor bearing with extreme care a green-lined umbrella and the last word in zephyr rain-coats.

Miss Halliday was frankly agape, and when he raised his hat on passing them, Marama could imagine the turmoil of curiosity disturbing her companion's active mind.

"That was Ratu Madri," she explained considerately. "He's probably in for the sitting of the Legislative Assembly."

"Indeed," murmured Miss Halliday. "What a fine face — aristocratic, gentle, altogether superior."

"Do you think so?" said Marama, and her companion pursued the matter no further. She had noticed that the face of the girl beside her was still pale, with an emotion beyond even her power to analyse.

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CHAPTER XXV

THE MAN WHO KNEW

TWO weeks after the *Zelandia* had come and gone, bearing westward her cosmopolitan host of globe-trotters and a hold packed to overflowing with green bananas, the same trim cutter put into Suva harbour, and three men in white drills, followed by an army of native porters, sauntered towards the Club Hotel.

"Thank God!" breathed the fat stranger, leaning back in a protesting cane chair, and tipping his glass for the sheer pleasure of hearing the ice clink against its side. "Where's Milton gone now?"

"I don't know," said Grieve.

The other turned in his chair to speak, but on second thoughts gave the whisky and soda preference.

"Don't understand it," he muttered, wiping his moustache and feeling for his cigar-case at

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the same time. "Don't understand it at all. Fiji's attractive and demoralizing, I'll grant, but you'd think after three years of it — whew! three years of this! — a man 'ud want to get out instead of chasing runaway half-castes. 'Pon my soul, sometimes I think Milton's sorry we found him!"

"Do you?" replied Grieve in a weary drawl that showed long familiarity with mechanical answers.

"I do," asserted the other. "What's more, I'm sick of it! We've done what we came to these infernal parts to do, and I'm going to get out of them by the next boat."

"Whether Milton comes with us or not?"

"Yes, whether Milton comes with us or not."

"All right."

"What's that?"

"I said all right."

"Which means that you don't intend to do the same?"

Grieve crossed one elongated leg over the other and lit a cigarette.

"I didn't say so," he said; "I'll let you know — probably to-morrow morning."

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Craig was in a deck chair under one of the trees that line Victoria Parade, looking out across the harbour. Where in God's name had she gone? She could hardly have left Taviuni, or he would have heard of it; and yet — almost anything was possible. His well-meaning relative and friend, whom he felt he was treating abominably after all they had done for him, had inveigled him thus far on the journey homeward, but what was home to him without Marama? He would return by the next boat and continue the search until he found her. Why had she gone? Because she had changed her mind. Because she had thought that when he knew he was free, he would not want her. The first of these answers to his eternal questions was unthinkable; the second, just sufficiently possible to keep him on tenterhooks to get back to Taviuni. Yes, certainly, he would see Grieve and his uncle off on the next boat and return at once.

He was still looking out across the harbour, when he became aware of a tall figure beside him, and looked up to see Ratu Madri's smiling face above him.

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"We're playing the government to-morrow," he drawled; "would you care to umpire for us?"

The cool question was so characteristic, that for a moment Craig was nonplussed. He felt instinctively that it was beyond his power to cut Ratu Madri, if indeed it was in his province to do so.

"I notice you don't ask me to bowl," he said, resuming his former attitude.

"Well, naturally," replied the chief, flicking the grass with his gold-headed cane. "I heard about the accident to your arm, and now I see it in a sling. It would be difficult to bowl — especially a googly — with one's left arm in a sling."

"You call it an accident," said Craig.

"I look on whatever a man like Maddon happens to do as an accident. The man himself was an accident — in an otherwise admirably ordered universe. Perhaps, though, at the present time, you don't look upon the universe as well-ordered."

"I can't say I do," Craig admitted.

Ratu Madri signed to the faithful servitor

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with the umbrella and zephyr rain-coat, who promptly drew forward another deck chair, into which the chief sank with a sigh of satisfaction.

"It seems to me excellent," he resumed, tapping his left calf affectionately with his cane. "Fate has such a happy knack of equalising things. For instance, in our case — of course Miss Thurston has told you my part in the affair?"

Craig hesitated a moment, then nodded.

"Well, you see at one time or another each of us thought we had won, instead of which we have both lost."

"I'm not beaten yet," said Craig.

Ratu Madri smiled.

"No? Well, it makes no difference; you may refuse to acknowledge defeat if it pleases you, but for all that you are beaten — as thoroughly as I am. You haven't the vaguest idea where she is."

"Have you?"

Craig wheeled in his chair with a suddenness that would have startled nine men out of ten. The tenth in this instance happened to be Ratu Madri.

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"My dear Craig," he drawled, extending his upturned, pale-palmed hand in lethargic protest. "You nearly scared me out of my wits. Have I? Well, think. Three weeks ago — or was it four? I really forget — I thought I was engaged to be married to Miss Thurston; in fact a plump Wesleyan missionary slept at Bau one night in order to perform the ceremony the next morning. I think he enjoyed his visit, but it was quite unnecessary, because when the time arrived there was no bride. Owing to an accident — one of those small occurrences that account for so much in this life — her attention had been suddenly diverted from me to you. How on earth should I know where she is. It would be far more natural for me to ask you that question."

Craig sat sidewise in the chair, his eyes riveted on the chief's placid, smiling face, that might hide anything — or nothing. His own was drawn and tense.

"If I thought you knew —" he began slowly, then stopped.

Ratu Madri leant forward with sudden interest.

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"Yes?" he said, "this is really interesting. If you thought I knew, what then, Craig?"

Craig looked back at him steadily, then glanced down at his bandaged arm.

"I think I should serve you as you tried to serve me," he said.

"I don't quite follow."

"Perhaps it is convenient. Maddon told me things before he died."

"Really? And do you place much faith in what Maddon was in the habit of saying before he died?"

"Not — as a rule."

"Well, then —" Ratu Madri disposed of the subject with a flick of his cane. "I really shouldn't take it too seriously, Craig. I don't. But if by any chance you want to take it seriously, imagine I do know and act up to it. I should be interested to see precisely what happens."

Craig saw the futility of further discussion. Moreover, he was not slow to discern the veiled insolence behind Ratu Madri's easy manner, the snarl of the primitive man inviting conflict. He got up from the chair.

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"What, going?" commented the chief. "How about umpiring to-morrow?"

"Good evening," said Craig, and walked across the road to the hotel with drooping shoulders.

Did he know? Craig was not certain. There was never anything quite certain about Ratu Madri.

That evening, after dinner, a meal that only a Suva hotel would dare to give the name, Grieve followed Craig on to the verandah, and lay in a wicker chair not four feet distant, fully aware that the space that separated might be four miles, for all the notice that would be taken of him.

His oldest friend was hard hit. He knew it, marvelled and sympathised, but realised that something must be done to bring things to a head. He blew a smoke ring towards the ceiling and took the plunge.

"Milton," he said, "won't you give us a trial?"

Craig turned in his chair and accorded him an uncomprehending stare.

"What's that?" he grunted.

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"I said, won't you give us a trial?" Grieve repeated, staring assiduously ceilingwards. "You owe us something, you know."

Craig seemed to digest this for a space. Then he struggled out of the chair and came over to his friend.

"Don't I know it, Tony?" he said, looking down on him with as much affection as Anglo-Saxons ever allow themselves to show for one another. "And don't I know I've treated you and uncle rottenly — damnably? Say it; say what you like; get it off your chest! I know you're aching to. Don't mind me."

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes."

"Well, I repeat: won't you give *us* a trial? We're not so bad, and the country we come from's not so bad either; it's England, home and beauty. I know the counter-attraction, but it'll keep. Just come home and see if we'll do. If we don't, you can come back —'

Craig still looked down on him and smiled.

"You don't understand," he said.

"I knew you'd say that," Grieve retorted. "But I'll tell you what I do understand: this

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confounded country's got into your blood. You're neurotic, and if you don't watch it, you'll go under without bobbing up again. You think this is the real thing here. Perhaps it is — perhaps it isn't. I think it isn't. I think the whole country's a dream that'll break up the minute you come up against the healthy, sober substance of your own world at home. But it doesn't matter what I think; test it! You admit you owe us something; will you test it?"

Craig turned away and looked out over the lights of Victoria Parade.

"It's only fair," Grieve's voice came to him. "It's only cricket."

"I'm certain you're wrong." The words came very slowly, rather indistinctly. Craig's face was still averted. "I know you're wrong, but —"

"But it's only fair," Grieve urged triumphantly. "You do see that, Milton."

"Yes," said Craig. "I see that it's fair — in a way."

Grieve relapsed into his chair and drew at his long-expired cigarette.

"So of course — you will," he announced.

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There was a long silence. Both men remained motionless, each thinking his own thoughts. Somewhere, out of the night, came the faint, musical staccato of a lali.[1]

"I must go to Taviuni again," said Craig absently.

"Who's trying to prevent you?" queried Grieve. "What's more, I'll come with you and help all I can, but—" he drew an A. U. S. N. sailing-list from his pocket and ran down the column with an attenuated forefinger "—the *Nousouri* leaves Suva a month from to-day, and we've got to catch her; is that a bargain? It's fair does."

Craig turned and looked at him.

"You're wrong," he said.

"But it's fair does."

"What a persistent old devil it is!"

"It's fair does. It's a bargain?"

"Yes."

Grieve heaved himself out of the chair and repressed a wild desire to shout.

"What d'you say to fifty up?" he suggested instead.

1 Wooden drum.

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CHAPTER XXVI

IN WHICH MARAMA FINDS SHE HAS LITTLE TO SELL

"THANK you. We will let you know as soon as we hear of anything likely to suit."

It was only another harassed manageress of a registry office speaking, and unconsciously voicing the very words five others had used that afternoon to Marama's knowledge.

She rose slowly from the chair beside the ink-stained desk, giving place to another candidate from the queue of women and girls ranged round the walls of the waiting-room, passed down the bare, winding stairs, and out into the street.

It was Finchley Road, and it was February. Little more need be said, except that Marama Thurston wandered slowly along it, a neat, inconspicuous figure. She had long since passed the stage of palpitating hope and bitter disappointment, and had drifted into a certain resignation as to what London refused or

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deigned to offer. She recognised it as only to be expected that in the greatest market of the world, life should consist of barter. The pity of it was she had so little to offer that London would buy — and she would sell.

She had had two situations, one as "lady help" to an iron-jawed woman at Kensington, a position which, on closer acquaintance, had proved to consist of pushing a peevish but heavy child in a perambulator through Kensington Gardens, until it wept so incessantly that Marama was dismissed as unfit to "take charge of children."

And another as "lady waitress" in an underground coffee and domino "dive" in the city, where she thought she had at last found asylum, until the attentions of a middle-aged member of the Stock Exchange made things impossible.

Hitherto she had drawn the line at the more menial situations offered by the registry offices, such as "kitchen maid," and "general," but now, as she wended an aimless way up the Finchley Road, it was borne in upon her, not for the first time, that from a practical viewpoint this line was entirely imaginary. She determined

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henceforth to erase the line, banish her visions of "lady" this, and "lady" that, and accept whatever offered.

Anything was better than living as she was living at present — in comparative comfort under Miss Halliday's roof, but continually confronted by the detestable fact that she was subsisting on charity. Not that the kindly little lady had ever, by word or manner, hinted at such a thing, but it was the truth, and to a sensitive girl like Marama, it was ever present, nagging, torturing.

Moreover, a few days after her arrival in England, she had made a discovery that only served to increase her obligations. Miss Halliday was not at all well off. She occupied a minute flat at Muswell Hill, subsisted for the most part on milk and biscuits, and with the absurd prodigality of her kind, kept open house to a weirder assortment of people than Marama had imagined could exist.

The South Sea trip, as Marama was quick to discern, had been a flash in the pan; an exceedingly brilliant flash that had left Miss Halliday's financial outlook darkened in consequence.

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It could not go on, Marama told herself, as she turned towards Muswell Hill; and then she fell to wondering.

This was her only relaxation from the grim reality of things. She looked upon these moments — when she allowed her imagination to flit and light at will — as something almost sacred. Where was *he* now? Most certainly in London. It pleased her to think that he was somewhere in the same vast wilderness that encompassed her. Of course he had met "the girl." Probably he had been met by her. How pleased he would be; how pleased she would be, after all those years. By this time he had fallen into place in his world like a roulette ball that has spun and ricochetted over-long. Again she wondered, as she had wondered on the beach of Taviuni, *what* he was. What place he had filled in the throbbing life of London before his exile. She smiled at the thought of how much, yet how little, she knew of him. Was he of the great army of men of leisure who did nothing in particular, with such consummate grace? Or was he one of the still greater band who pretended — even thought — that they were doing some-

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thing when they were not? A professional man perhaps . . .

"What wouldn't I give to see a genuine pea-souper again. . . . I should go out and taste it, smell it, revel in it. . . ." He would be revelling now, Marama thought, looking along the wet pavements and noting the yellow halo of murk about the street lamps and shop windows.

By this time she had reached the flat and was toiling up the stone steps that echoed metallic to her weary tread.

"It could not go on," her thoughts reiterated, as she slipped the latch-key into the lock.

Miss Halliday was talking earnestly with some one — a man — in the minute living-room. Marama went straight to her bedroom to take off her hat and muddy shoes. She felt tired, depressed, but at least she had come to a decision, and that was something.

There was the sound of voices, the slam of the hall door, and a moment later Miss Halliday bounced into the room with a card in her hand and excitement in her eyes.

"Do you know who that was?" she demanded, blinking rapidly.

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"No."

Marama contrived to imbue the monosyllable with the required amount of interest.

"Harvey Reynolds."

"Good gracious! Who is he?"

"My dear child, have you never heard of Harvey Reynolds?" Miss Halliday commenced to pace the room with short, nervous strides. Her forehead, it seemed to Marama, was more than usually shiny and intelligent-looking. "But of course you haven't. I'm afraid I've neglected you terribly, Marama, but there, you understand — such joy! The first travel book I have ever been able to write, and it's simply pouring itself out of me. I'm a tea-pot — no, perhaps inkpot would be better — full to the brim, with a nice, free-running spout — touch wood!" She placed her hand on the mantelpiece in passing.

"The title came to-day," she continued, as though it had arrived by parcel post; "*The Complete Beachcomber!* We have our Complete Angler, Complete this, and Complete that; why not our Complete Beachcomber? I'm showing just what can be done and seen in the Islands on fourpence a day!"

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"You were telling me about Harvey Reynolds," Marama prompted.

"Ah, to be sure," chirped Miss Halliday. "Harvey Reynolds is 'The Harvey Reynolds Circuit,' something extra special in the music hall — I beg its pardon, variety theatre — line. They told him about me at the Three Arts, the dears! Really, it's wonderful what a club can do for one. He's producing a *revue* — South Sea, of all things! — and he's quite enthusiastic about it. He says people are tired of rag-time — I'm sure I hope so — and he's going to give them something different. That's to be the title, by the way: *Something Different.* So clever, I think! He wants me to 'supervise' costumes and effects; says I ought to know what's what. I haven't a notion what it all means, beyond fifty pounds on the first night. I hardly know if I'm on my head or my heels!"

"I'm glad," said Marama, "so glad."

Something in her voice arrested Miss Halliday's attention. She took an abrupt seat on the edge of the bed beside Marama.

"You're tired, child," she said, taking full stock of her for the first time in three weeks.

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"Why, good gracious, your cheeks are positively hollow! And your eyes . . ."

"Don't, please don't," pleaded Marama, covering her face with her hands.

"But I'm going to. This won't do, although really it might have been expected; fancy an orchid living in the open — in London — in February!"

"And please don't call me an orchid. I hate orchids; they're creepy, unnatural things, although they're beautiful. I want to be a good, hardy perennial."

"Well, all I can say is you don't look like one at present," chirped Miss Halliday. "But we'll see what a week at the seaside will do."

Marama looked back at her as she had done on the beach at Vuna.

"I think you would give away your soul if you could," she said slowly.

Miss Halliday bounced from the bed.

"Now you're going to talk money," she snorted. "I can smell it. Very well, then, I may tell you that I'm positively staggered at my own affluence when I look about me. I have a hundred and fifty a year and my work; what

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more can any scribbler — short of a journalist — want? I have often thought I should do better if I were starving in a garret. Now, what d'you say to Hythe? I could work there, I think."

Marama went over to the dressing table. From one of the drawers she took a small, black notebook and opened it at the first page.

"I don't know how much deeper you want me to get into your debt," she said. "At present my assets stand — I think that's the right word — at thirty shillings, saved from the coffee 'dive'; and my liabilities amount in figures to £55.7.4, but actually to about seventy pounds."

Miss Halliday's hand was on the door handle.

"Please don't go," said Marama; "I really have something to say. I want you to lend me twenty pounds more — but in a lump. Could you manage it, somehow?"

Miss Halliday blinked.

"What madness is this, Marama?" she asked helplessly. "I always know you're going to do something extraordinary when you're so horribly cold and practical."

"I want to leave London — England!"

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Marama replied. "I want to go where there's room to move and breathe; where there's a chance. There's none here. It was cheek on my part to imagine there was — for me. What can I do that's of any real use to anyone. How can I expect people to pay me for what I haven't got?"

Miss Halliday had crossed the room to her side.

"Marama, child," she said; "don't take it so much to heart. Money isn't everything —"

"Every one earns their right to live, somehow," Marama interrupted. "I must earn mine. I must go where it is possible — either Australia, New Zealand, or South Africa. I don't mind where, so long as there's a chance."

Miss Halliday's hand was on her arm. Marama placed hers upon it.

"Some day, somehow, I shall be able to thank you for all you've done," she said. "I can't now. You said just now I'm cold and practical. I am. I've reached a stage when what little was left after — after Taviuni, seems to have gone out of me, except the wish to work and pay you back. Don't snort! I shall do it some day, but

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not while I stay in London. I've been thinking a lot lately; London is only for the competent, the past-masters. It's the same in everything; you must graduate somewhere else. I must earn my right to live some way. Please lend me twenty pounds!"

Miss Halliday laughed in spite of herself.

"You're the quaintest thing, Marama," she said, taking her arm and leading the way into the narrow passage. "Cheer up! And get yourself some supper; I think you'll find an egg in the larder."

That night, Marama was brushing her hair at the dressing table, when her eye was attracted by the reflection in the looking-glass of something small and white against the dark green quilt of her bed. It proved to be Harvey Reynolds' card, and after a casual glance, she placed it on the dressing table, finished her hair and switched off the light.

She was too tired to sleep. For a while she lay tossing from side to side, laying her plans for the morrow — the visit to the shipping agents, the signing of papers setting forth her

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age, nationality and occupation, all the necessary, obnoxious details for an emigrant passage. It was good to have something definite to look forward to. She would at least be worth something — not a drug in the market. She could take a post as governess on a station. She could . . . Quite suddenly she became still, looking up into the darkness with wide eyes and parted lips. She remained so for perhaps three minutes, then slid swiftly from the bed and switched on the light.

The card on the dressing-table still confronted her, a thing of admirable restraint: "Mr. Harvey Reynolds," and in pencil in the left-hand corner: "5 Basset Mansions, Langhan Place W." That must be his private address, she reflected, and continued to study it, seated on the edge of an arm-chair. A flush mounted to her pale cheeks; her eyes shone with suppressed excitement.

Presently she got up and, crossing the room, stood motionless before the wardrobe glass. Her reflection neither pleased nor displeased her. She stood, as it were, a detached spectator, weighing every quality of the slim, white figure

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before her, waiting to appraise its movement also. Was it possible that any one in this drab, unimaginative London would understand, appreciate? That was for Harvey Reynolds to decide. She commenced to sway . . .

An hour later she lay on the bed, flushed and breathless. She had never before seen herself dance. It had pleased her. Would it please London? Harvey Reynolds would know; and Harvey Reynolds would say what he knew very quickly.

At eleven o'clock the next morning, with a wildly-beating heart, Marama was at his door.

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CHAPTER XXVII

THE REAL THING

DISTANCE in London is a matter of little importance. A man may be five yards from some one he most earnestly desires to meet, yet it may be five years, or five minutes, if at all, before that meeting takes place.

Twice during the past three weeks Craig had been within calling distance of Marama Thurston without knowing it. Even now, as he walked down Northumberland Avenue towards his rooms, she was flashing up it in a taxicab; moreover, each happened to be lost in thoughts of the other. So much for distance in London; and so much for mental telepathy.

The month's search in Fiji, so assiduously bargained for by the faithful Grieve, had passed like a week, and at the end of it Craig had been forced to bow his head, and fulfil his pledge.

He had done all that he had promised — given

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his own "sober world" a trial, only to find, as he had known, that it was no longer his.

There are those who consider London anything but objectionable in May, and Craig remembered with mild surprise that he had been one of these. He wondered how the thing had been possible. There was sunshine — sometimes. The parks and open spaces were tenderly green. There were streams of exceedingly well-dressed and exceedingly poorly-dressed men and women. There were restaurants and clubs full of people he had known more or less intimately, but who now interested him not at all. There were substantial, smoke-begrimed buildings, which in the past he had regarded as old friends, but which, as he passed them now, merely struck him as dismal to a degree. There was the girl. . . . Unconsciously his hand went to his breast pocket, feeling through the cloth the square outline of something that lay within, while a frown puckered his still deeply-bronzed forehead.

Anything more ghastly than his meeting with Edith Strickland at Southampton, he failed to remember: a tall, handsome woman, exquisitely

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dressed, graciously smiling, eminently pleasing as she had always been, but — an utter stranger!

Then there had commenced the attempt to pick up the thread of their relationship where it had been broken. The thought of these efforts, aided and abetted by his uncle and Grieve, filled Craig with contempt for himself and anger against his friends. For the past three weeks he had cursed Grieve mutely, elaborately, not less than ten times daily; but now . . . Again his hand went to his breast pocket; his pace quickened.

A few minutes later, he stopped before the Stricklands' barn-like abode in Grosvenor Square, and rang the bell.

A servant showed him into the familiar drawing-room and left him to his own devices, which consisted in strolling over to the windows and staring out on a strip of superlatively groomed lawn.

It was not until Edith Strickland, faultless as ever, was half-way across the room, that he fully realised the delicacy of the task that lay before him. Ought he to kiss her or not? How diabol-

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ically self-possessed she was! What a cur he felt!

She was standing before him now, looking into his face with a serenity that he found disconcerting. She had said something by way of greeting, but he was not at all sure what.

"I'm sorry about this morning," he faltered, "but — I thought it better to put it off until I had seen you — alone."

His glance travelled round the room and came to rest on a Venetian vase. Edith Strickland made no movement nor suggestion that they should sit down. One of her white hands rested on the piano; the tapering fingers of the other were entwined in a necklace of turquoise matrix. She was waiting for what he had to say with as much interest as Craig had ever seen her display. He plunged desperately.

"I came to ask you to break off our engagement," he blurted.

There was a brief though pregnant pause; then Edith Strickland sighed.

"Why on earth didn't you say so at first," she drawled. "I thought you were going to tell me some one was run over or something dreadful like that."

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A great wave of relief surged over Craig. Of a sudden he felt master of himself.

"You're a brick, Edith," he told her.

"Why?"

"To — well, to take it like this."

She looked into his eyes and smiled.

"My dear Milton, what would you have me do — scream, faint, weep?"

"You're a brick," he repeated. "Let's sit down; I want to talk."

"What about?"

"Us."

"Do you think it necessary?"

"If you don't mind."

They were on the sofa, side by side. Craig was at ease with this stranger for the first time in three weeks.

"I was rather interested to see when you would do it, and how you would do it," she said.

"Then you knew I was going to do it?"

"Of course, unless I did it first, but in the end I thought I'd leave it to you."

"I don't blame you." Craig flicked out a handkerchief and mopped his brow. "Whew!"

"Was it as bad as that?"

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"Quite."

"I'm sorry."

"Our worthy friends took too much for granted," Craig complained. "They don't seem to realise that a man and a woman can change completely in three years."

"I should be glad to think I had changed," murmured Edith Strickland thoughtfully.

"Do you mean to say you haven't?"

"I'm afraid not. What possible chance is there of changing for most of us?"

Craig studied her silently for a moment. In her present indifference towards an issue usually considered vital, he read his own attitude of three years ago. It startled him.

"I shouldn't think you'd want to change," he suggested.

"That's very nice of you, Milton. I'll return the compliment; you have changed, very decidedly — for the better."

Craig flushed.

"I know I'm different," he said, "whether better or worse. I've seen life at close quarters, wrestled with it, too, and it has taught me to feel more deeply, for one thing, and not to be

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ashamed of it, for another. I think that must be one of the troubles here; people don't allow themselves to feel deeply; it's bad form."

Edith Strickland leant back on the cushions and regarded Craig's bronzed face out of the corner of her grey-green eyes.

"Don't you think it's a good thing for some of us that we don't?" she drawled. "You had better leave things where they are, Milton."

Craig leapt to his feet.

"Perhaps I had," he agreed. "In any case I shan't be able to do much to remedy matters; I'm sailing for Fiji the day after to-morrow."

"Really? You'll run in before you go?"

"Thanks, yes; good-bye."

When he had left, Edith Strickland went over to the looking-glass and studied her reflection minutely. From the expression of her face it was impossible to say whether it pleased or displeased her, but—"I wonder who she is," she murmured, sighed, and picked up a novel.

"I feel," Craig told Grieve the following evening over an early dinner, "I feel as if I'd climbed out of a marsh. What's it to be? Anything you like except a musical comedy."

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CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LUCK OF IT

THE curtain rose to the tick of 7.45. This was necessary, because *Something Different* was an elaborate affair, and although the illusive public might drift in as late as it chose, it has a marked predilection for drifting out again in time for the "theatre train" or supper.

By living up to its title, *Something Different* had tickled London's vitiated palate, and Harvey Reynolds wore such a smile as had not creased his plump features for many a day.

In Part 3. at nine-thirty, or as near it as the gagging of the comedian in the previous episode allowed, the vast interior of the Regents Theatre was suddenly, and without the slightest warning, plunged into total darkness.

On the stage, a dim, yellow glow came into being and slowly grew, revealing at first indefinitely, then with greater clarity, and finally in

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a clean-cut shaft of light from directly overhead, the squatting, motionless figure of a young girl. By her very stillness she seemed to hold the vast audience still, also. It seemed almost incredible that she could be alive, squatting like the graven image of some heathen goddess in her flimsy draperies and necklaces of seeds, with streaming hair and eyes transfixed.

Save for this globule of light which encircled her, the theatre was still in darkness, adding to the effect of the music which now began to throb and wail from an unseen orchestra and chorus. The figure of the young girl began to quiver, causing the seed necklaces to glint yellow fire; then to sway, rising as it swayed, until it reached its full, slim height with arms upheld and rigid body — a steady, yellow flame.

From somewhere came the sound of wind, and the flame faltered — fluttering, flickering this way and that; at one moment streaming before the blast; at another righting itself during a momentary lull, but always alive — quivering, undulating to the rhythm of the music.

Then came a sudden gust. The flame streamed before it — flickered — faded — died,

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and the audience was left staring at an empty, darkened stage.

On the programme it was called The Dance of the Candle Flame. As a discovery Harvey Reynolds was rather proud of it, especially as several of the newspapers had labelled it "altogether too artistic and delicate for a *revue* . . ."

Other opinions had been expressed about it from time to time, but probably the quaintest emanated on a certain evening from a gentleman in the sixth row of the stalls.

At the very commencement of The Dance of the Candle Flame, he had sat leaning forward with a pair of opera glasses glued to his eyes and trained on the flitting figure on the stage. Perhaps four seconds passed before he moved at all; then he merely parted his lips to murmur quietly, but with extraordinary emphasis: "Well, I'm damned!"

Presently the shaft of light shone again on the motionless figure of the girl. No. 2 was The Dance of the Hurricane; but Craig could stand no more. Grieve had spoken to him twice without receiving any answer, and was now uncere-

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moniously left in the company of a cigarette and his thoughts.

Craig was in a wet and draughty by-lane, walking back and forth before a dingy-looking doorway through which pale-faced people came and went incessantly. Once he took out his card-case and made a move in its direction, but on second thought thrust it back into his pocket and continued his walking, with bent head and hands that worked nervously behind his back.

There were others waiting there — shabby, spruce, or ornate — and some of them found time to wonder what this restless fellow mortal, with the deeply-bronzed face and nervous hands, was doing amongst them. He was hardly the type of the stage door lounger, and yet — there was no knowing. Certainly his glance was quick and eager enough when any one emerged from the dim interior into the yellow light of the gas-jet above the doorway; but invariably he glanced away again and resumed his ceaseless walking — back and forth, back and forth.

Suddenly he stopped. A taxicab purred up to the curbing, and the loiterers moved aside to

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make passage for the hurrying, closely-cloaked figure of a woman.

The door of the taxicab was closed after her by a "shabby," and the car was already in motion when Craig wrenched it open, and sprang inside, shutting it behind him with a vigorous bang.

"Seems in a hurry," remarked an "ornate," and the others grinned.

Somewhere, out in the hurrying, lamp-lit streets, a taxicab picked its way through the traffic.

"The luck of it!" Craig was saying, while his eyes feasted on the woman at his side. "I was sailing for Fiji to-morrow!"

Marama looked round at him.

"Why?" she queried.

"To find you," he answered; "what else?"

"But . . ."

Craig smiled into her eyes.

"There are no 'buts' for us now, Marama," he said; "none at all."

The taxi sped on through the lamp-lit streets.

THE END

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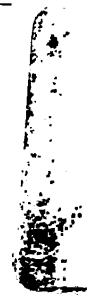

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